Shattered Hope

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The Night Dimension is falling apart, and a new unknown leader has taken Wizeman's throne. On top of the new power threatening the dream world, children have stopped dreaming in Nightopia. With the help of NiGHTS, Juliet must reunite old friends in order to stop Nightmayr's plans for Nightopia. Part of the NNT series

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Chapter 1

youre probably thinking to yourself "wait. isnt this the 5th time ive read this shit". and ure right.

rewriting once again to include extra scenes, characters and more developed lore stuff we've come up with cause we change our stories every few months and need to re add stuff so...sory bout that. also combining chapters so that i dont reach like...50... so the chapters till be getting pretty long now!

i encourage you to reread everything. theres a lot of stuff thats been updated and cleaned up from its previous renditions. thanks for continuing to follow our stories :)

The Dream Gate was quiet. It always was now. The air that was once warmed by the light of Ideya had chilled, however not even any wind was present to add a feeling of living to the small island. It was hard to tell how much time had passed since a visitor had last tread the ground of the world. Time worked so strangely in the Night Dimension, at least to him it did.

They never really knew how powerful the Ideya of a visitor was, and how much it contributed to Nightopia's existence. Without the visitor there is no Ideya, without the Ideya there is no Nightopia, without Nightopia there is no life.

The gate of dreams was old and rusted. Doors were falling apart, the ground was cracking apart, and worst of all, it was lonely. He hated feeling lonely.

Ever since Wizeman had ended his own reign nothing was the same, but a correlation was hard to make sense of. Wizeman always warned the rebel of the implications of his defeat. He didn't like to listen. Now his creator was punishing him for it.

Even so, the nightmaren now live on. He was unsure of how, and

why they were forced to feel the weight of Wizeman's consequences. Without Ideya though, he thought, how much *were* they living on? Why would Wizeman curse even those who loyally followed him till the end? All he ever wanted was for Wizeman to finally be gone, was this all his fault?

Something had to be done to preserve the remnants of Nightopia, to preserve the Dream Gate. The Dream Gate was the first place he could truly call home, and now it was crying to him. What he needed was hope.

NiGHTS flew over to the small pond secluded within the forest outskirts. He could see his reflection clearly through the still water. What was hope? He thought to himself. It was a bright yellow light, he knew that, but could it exist without visitors? He had helped so many visitors find their hope, where was his own tor ecover?

A faint flapping sound echoed nearby, the small noise still rang loud in the nightmarens ears. Normally it was a nuisance of a noise, but he realized how comforting it really was now more than ever.

"Hoo, well I never would have expected to see you here." Owl intruded, in a rather sarcastic tone to the jester.

NiGHTS didn't respond, he just continued to stare deep into their reflection in the pond. It had been so long since they had gotten a good look at themselves, what they truly were that is. A nightmaren, created to destroy the dreams of humans. He tried so hard to fight that instinct, but he still messed it up in the end.

"Don't look too far, you might fall in." The elderly bird hooted, brushing his feathers against NiGHTS' body.

Owl had managed to break NiGHTS out of their trance, and the nightmaren could only respond with a worried expression.

"Hoo, I say! This isn't like you at all! Not even a snarky remark, hm? Well then something most certainly is troubling you. Go on, talk to me please, you're the only one who does nowadays anyway!"

NiGHTS glanced over to the bird, he tried to remain expressionless

but Owl could see the hurt in his eyes.

"Do not blame yourself, young one. This place already was not built to last forever. We knew there would be future consequences when we separated it from it's mainland." Owl's eyes squinted towards the nightmaren with sadness, this was obviously a sensitive subject for the bird.

"But it should've lasted longer," NiGHTS huffed, "why didn't it? Why haven't any visitors shown up anymore?" He lifted himself up and angrily kicked at the pond, splashing Owl in the process, "even after he's gone Wizeman is still destroying Nightopia!"

"Hoo, hoo!" Owl ruffled his feathers to shake off the cold water, "why do you put so much blame on him? I do think the lack of visitors after his recent er… destruction… is a bit odd, but…"

"But what?" NiGHTS snapped, "that's it exactly! There has to be a reason, it has to be *his* fault! Because otherwise it would be..-"

"Your fault?" Owl finished solemnly, "now, young one. I don't think you really mean that. What could you have possibly done, scared all the visitors away?"

Owl was only joking, but he realized at that moment what he had brought back to NiGHTS' memories, and the nightmaren went silent for a while. The owl perched himself on the ground, looking up at NiGHTS. "Although you have regrets, you know this is not your fault, and I know you won't stop until you can fix things."

NiGHTS, sulking in the air, glanced down at Owl. He had never been so serious sounding with him before. Well, maybe he has, but he had never listened before. His expression became determined. But Owl was right, he had tirelessly aided to protect Nightopia for ages, why would he stop now?

The nightmaren stretched himself out in the air, "thanks for the pep talk old bird, maybe you are good for something around here!" He smirked. Normally Owl would yell at him for respect, but he was just glad to see NiGHTS' attitude back to its old self.

"I suppose so," the bird responded with a smug smile.

"Now where was I?" NiGHTS clapped his hands together, looking around the deserted floating island, "that's right! I need to find some hope around here."

Juliet Evans blinked her eyes open from her sleep. Sitting up, she stretched her arms up to the sky, groaning a bit. Looking over to her calendar, she saw it was September 19th, the day before her birthday.

She grinned to herself, excited for what the day had in store for her on her birthday-eve. She hopped out of bed, quickly throwing on her school uniform so she could go down and eat before walking to school.

When she entered her kitchen to see what her mother was making she saw there had been no one inside. *Weird* , Juliet thought, *I could've sworn I smelled mom making eggs* … She shrugged this thought off rather quickly, and left through her front door on the way to school.

The moment she stepped outside her front door, the outside shifted into the inside of her school as she walked through its main entrance. She didn't remember walking.

The hallways appeared to be deserted, all the classrooms were empty, and every light in the school had been shut off. When Juliet walked through the main lobby, a large banner was stretched across the wall that read "Happy Graduation!"

Confused by this, Juliet simply ignored it and continued onward to where her locker was. She was always early… but never *this* early to school. She found herself at her locker sooner than anticipated as it materialized in front of her. Juliet turned the lock and opened it, but the entire inside of it looked like it had been emptied out completely. There was nothing inside except for a small card that was addressed her.

Congratulations on Graduation!, it read, *Good luck on future, you're on your own from here on out! Love, Mom and Dad.* Juliet dropped

the card in a panic, and slammed her locker shut without placing her backpack inside. She frantically turned away and began walking quickly down the hallway, trying to look for anyone else in the building.

A flickering light down one of the halls on the first floor caught her eye, and she found herself turning down into it without a second thought. The lights flickered faster and faster as her pace quickened, and once again every classroom seemed to be void of any students- and even desks and chairs.

There was a crowd of people at the end of the hall around the entrance to the cafeteria, she sighed with relief as she approached what appeared to be her classmates, but when the crowd of people turned to face her she realized she did not recognize anyone. They were older, all wearing their graduation caps and gowns. Their chatty conversations stopped as Juliet approached them and they all began to laugh at her. Looking down at her. Berading her for not being ready to follow the rest of them on the cafeteria stage.

The crowd drew in closer to her, it was hard to make out what they were saying through their loud chanting and Juliet's own heart beat as she stepped backward feeling the pressure close in. *You should've grew up! What a disappointment!* Their words became more and more clear.

Just when Juliet thought she couldn't take the yelling panic anymore, the energy of the crowd began to shift. The air felt heavy on Juliet as their eyes began to glow red and their bodies seemed to mesh together in a collection of shadow. She didn't even realize she had fallen on the ground until she had to pick herself off of it, and take off as the creatures behind her began to give chase. The yelling had stopped, but all she could hear now was how heavy her breathe was as she sprinted down the hallways that began to shift into the darkness with the creatures. Before she even had the chance to give up, a bright light emitted from the distance in the hallway, nearly blinding her. It felt warm, and seemed like it was beckoning her to took a step closer to the light...and closer… and closer...until the brightness had completely absorbed her body.

The girl blinked her eyes to find herself in a new area, definitely one

she had never been to before. She glanced behind her to see if that light- or if those creatures were still there. All she found behind her was a swirling sea, too dark to tell if anything was really down there.

She brushed herself off, looking down at her clothes and noticing they had mysteriously changed. *I could've sworn I was wearing my uniform* … Juliet concerned herself. She began to walk forward, strolling through the large gates ahead of her that lead to a small courtyard of sorts. The woods surrounding her reminded her of the woods she played in as a kid, but what caught her eye was the large fountain at the center. Upon closer inspection, it did not seem to have any water in it. It must have at some point, right?

She approached the fountain, becoming more intrigued by where she had found herself, and how she found herself *here* . Nothing here quite made sense, it was almost as if she was in a dream of some sort. But if she was really dreaming, she wouldn't be able to know if she was, so what was going on?

What are you doing here?

She heard a voice, but she couldn't quite tell where it was coming from.

"I… huh?" She looked around, confused, "who is that?"

You shouldn't be here, why are you here?

The voice was deep with an accent similar to her own, she could tell it's words were threatening but the voice sounded almost scared.

Something felt heavy on her legs. Juliet gained the courage to look down to see the culprit, but all there was surrounded her was a dark shadowy figure, seeming to be connected to her own. It jumped out at her.

Juliet woke up with a startle. The groggy shift from her dream to reality took moments to get used to before she turned over in her bed to face her alarm clock, which was flashing '5:00' in her face. The date said it was 18th. She groaned as she sat in bed and let out a big yawn, stretching her arms up to the ceiling, feeling like she just

went through this.

"So it was just… a dream." Juliet mumbled, turning back to her alarm clock. It felt too real, in a way she couldn't understand or explain. She shook her head as she swung her legs over the side of her bed, getting up to get ready for the day all over again.

Same as usual, she threw on her uniform and bounded downstairs. This time, she passed her mother cooking breakfast in the kitchen on her way to the bathroom.

"And why are you in such a rush this morning?" Her mom called to her.

"I'm always in a rush!" Juliet called back while she frantically brushed her hair.

"Well, stop being in a rush and have some breakfast before you go, are you sure you don't want your father to drive you today?"

Juliet exited the bathroom and walked back into the kitchen to take a seat at the table, "I told you I like walking. It's fine."

Her mom just chuckled in response and made Juliet a plate of eggs along with hers. Sometimes Juliet was always in such a rush to get to school she wouldn't eat breakfast, but her mom always made sure to throw a sandwich in her backpack before she dashed off.

"So... " Juliet looked up at her mom from the table, "tomorrows my birthday, right? Can we go out, maybe?"

"Maybe," she sighed, "I don't know if we'll have the time. You have to study, don't you?"

"But it's a weekend!" Juliet whined, "I don't have to be studying... *all* the time. We can still go have fun once in a while? There's that one trail by the park I really like, and then we can go out for dinner and then I'll worry about homework on Sunday!"

Her mom stood up to bring her finished plate to the sink, picking up Juliet's along with it, "We'll see. If we don't go out we can order whatever you want for home, okay? Why don't you ask Alaia if she

wants to come over for dinner?"

"Okay…" Juliet mumbled, sinking back in her chair a bit. Her parents never wanted to do anything fun with her anymore. She stood up, grabbing her bright purple backpack she's had since she started secondary school.

Juliet didn't live too far from her school, her walk was only a few blocks away. It was tedious this morning, though, she felt like she just went through this routine in her dream already. What a strange dream it was…

Juliet managed to get to school early, before most of the crowd of students showed up. She liked to give herself some time to study alone in the library before classes started, and often liked to show up as early as she was able to. It was about 10 minutes till her first lesson started and the halls were becoming quite busy. Time always seemed to breeze by when she was by herself. She packed up all of her things and left to go to her first class, excited to see her best friend, Alaia.

Alaia moved to Bellbridge at the start of secondary school, and the two became fast friends. Juliet never really had friends growing up, but it wasn't anything sad. She used to be able to strike up a chat with anyone, and could make friendly conversation with just about anyone in her class. As they grew up, Juliet realized she struggled more and more with connecting with those around her, and interacting became stressful. She came to realize she never really bothered to make any close friendships, but eventually once she and Alaia began talking the two became nearly inseparable.

While pushing through the now busy halls as much as she could, one misplaced step sent her straight into the path of another girl, and Juliet fell over, dropping her bag as it spilled out all over the floor.

"Ah-! I-I'm sorry! I wasn't paying attention to where I was going, I'm really sorry!" Juliet looked up, only to make direct eye contact with one of the upperclassmen at her school, Alice McHenry. The pink tips at the end of her long blonde hair were unmistakable as hers. Her brown eyes squinted in anger down at her.

Alice was notorious in the school, not for any special academic achievements or anything. She was just pretty. Juliet couldn't count the amount of boys she's dated on two hands. Juliet's never interacted with her before, until now. Being in two different grade levels there wasn't any opportunity for it. She wasn't quite sure what Alice was really like, but every school setting needs a stereotypical popular girl, right?

"Learn to walk on the right side of the hall," she fumed, " *I* have places to be too."

Alice brushed past Juliet without a second glance, strutting down the rest of the stairwell.

Juliet awkwardly went to pick up all of her things and was quiet while the crowd curved around her. Not expecting anyone to give her any notice after that, she was surprised as another student had dropped down to pick up a few of the pencils that spilled out.

"That's why they invented zippers on bags," he joked, handing the dropped items over to her.

It took her a few moments to process before reaching out and retrieving, "Right," she sheepishly smiled, turning red, "I was just in too much of a rush I guess."

"Yeah it happens a lot. Don't let it ruin your day though," he laughed.

Juliet stood up, holding her bag tightly against her chest now, "the fall was a little embarrassing but I think I'll live. I got to get to class now, though!" Without allowing the other to say another word to her, she quickly pivoted and hurried off to her class. If she had to interact with anyone else other than Alaia today after that she might reach her breaking point.

Finally making it to her class without any further interruptions on her part, Juliet took her seat next to her friend Alaia, who was doodling little flowers in one of her notebooks. She couldn't wait to tell her about her dream last night. Alaia always loved strange occurrences and was also a big psychology person. Juliet often went to her about dreams she'd had to try and figure out what they mean. The dream

she had last night must have something special hidden about it.

"It was so weird, I can't explain it." Juliet whispered to her friend Alaia after describing everything she could remember from the dream. "It was like I was there! I could feel things, I could hear things, it was all just too vivid!"

"Sometimes you make yourself think that when you wake up. Happens to me all the time." Alaia shrugged, not really knowing what to say. "Tell ya what," they leaned in closer to their friend, "Lemme know if it's recurring. This could make for an interesting project on my part."

Juliet smiled and nodded but their conversation was put to a hold as their teacher walked in and began handing out their tests. All she had to do was get through today, then she could have all weekend to sleep and dream some more, who even cared about her birthday at this point.

The weekend had passed. As predicted, her parents didn't take her out for her birthday. Instead, Alaia came over upon Juliet's mom's invitation, and they ordered take out from Juliet's favorite place down the street.

It was Sunday night, which meant she would get to see Alaia tomorrow at school again, and that's all she cared about at the moment. She didn't care about being 16, or studying for school. Something about Alaia made her feel safe, and like they could just be kids having fun together. Juliet laid in her bed and stared at the ceiling until her eyes closed, and soon she was drifting off into her sleep on the night after her birthday.

When she opened her eyes, she found herself in the familiar dream she was in a few nights ago. The gated clearing. It felt strange… she knew she was dreaming now, of course. Something felt different this time, though…. it all looked the same but something had changed from her previous arrival.

Noise.

That was it! There was noise. Water to be exact. The fountain

seems to have begun to spout water again, and it was beautiful. It really brought the area together, and made it seem less lonely. This little fountain changed so much, and it even brought a smile to Juliet's face.

"Hoo! Well I'm glad you like it, Visitor, it was your doing after all." A voice cooed behind the dreamer. She turned around to see a rather plump owl flapping its wings in her face.

"My… doing?" Juliet questioned, turning back around to look at the now-working fountain. She wasn't even questioning the talking owl at this point.

"Exactly. You see, this place hasn't been visited in ages! Because of that, well, it began to fall apart you see. Not having the dreams of your kind to hold it together I believe. You managed to bring an entire fountain to life just by placing your foot on this path. Your heart must desire something greatly, Visitor."

Juliet looked down, holding her hand close to her chest. She did desire something, but she never thought it would be that important.

"Where is 'this place', anyway? I dreamt of this place a few nights ago, too. I've never… had a dream like this before. How do I even know I'm dreaming?"

"This is the Night Dimension, and the place you are in now is known as the Dream Gate. You may refer to me as Owl. I help visitors who seem to have lost their way here, and you, my dear, are one of those visitors," the owl said, with pride, as if he hasn't said that line in years.

"So I *am* dreaming? But it all feels so real… *you* seem so real." Juliet pointed her finger at the owl, but as her hand was raised up, a bright red light blinded her vision for a few seconds. She immediately lowered her hands and placed them over her face in shock.

"A red Ideya!" Owl gasped as he stared at the new visitor.

"My, my, and a beautiful one at that! It's been so long since I've

seen *that* beautiful light…" A different voice chuckled behind the two. It was a colder voice, less calming than the owls tone.

"R-Reala!" Owl shuddered as he spoke the name. "Leave, now! You nightmaren still aren't allowed in the Dream Gate!"

"Hmph. You still care so much about this worn-down place? Fine. It has no use to me." Reala held his hand out to the confused dreamer. "I'm only here for the Ideya."

"Ideya? My name is *Juliet* …" She stammered.

Owl brushed his feathers against the dreamer, signaling for her to follow him. The two quickly ran to a door that had appeared within the courtyard.

This wasn't here before… Juliet thought to herself. Owl distracted a slightly frustrated Reala as she managed to slip through the door.

Another bright light engulfed the girl through the door, and she felt light as she stepped through it. The door opened up to a beautiful open paradise. There was a large lake, taking up most of the surface, and fields of lilac shrubs and trees that were just blooming pollinated the world. Fields of lavender flowers twisted around the mountains. The air felt new and clean. Juliet opened her arms to feel the sea breeze against her skin, almost forgetting about the peril that awaited behind them.

"Quickly!" Owl's apprehensive voice startled the visitor out of her trance. "Reala is not too far behind, we must protect your Ideya at all costs!"

She still didn't know what an Ideya was, but she figured now was not the best time to ask. That thing was after the two of them for some reason, and getting caught was the last thing she wanted to do.

"Alright, old timer." Reala growled, clawing up flowers from the ground to let out steam, "If it's Hide and Seek you want, it's Hide and Seek you'll get." With a snap of his fingers, several black holes opened up from the ground, releasing several other monster-like creatures into the air.

"Those are nightmaren…" Owl whispered into Juliet's ear. The two were laying down in the largest patch of lavender they could find. "It's been forever since I've seen them, they must have sensed your arrival," he trailed off with a sad tone.

"That's enough, Reala!" A new voice shouted, not too far away. Out flew a similar figure to that of Reala, but they seemed more cheerful and bright than the cold nightmaren.

"Phah, NiGHTS. It was only a matter time before you showed up, traitor." Reala growed, his sharp teeth biting his lip in anger.

"That's right, Reala! You know you missed me!" The jester, named NiGHTS, giggled happily. "And I missed you too! Come on Reala, let's go!"

"Another time, NiGHTS. My mission tonight does not involve you unfortunately, however I doubt I'll be able to see it through with you here anyway. I'll be dealing with you soon enough..." Reala called out to NiGHTS. The general summoned the other nightmaren away before returning through his own paraloop.

When NiGHTS was positive Reala had left, they turned around and called out. "It's safe now, they're all gone."

Juliet stood up with Owl, both were a little shaken from the events.

"I've never seen him so persistent on hunting a visitor before… I wonder if the lack of dreams lately is affecting Nightmare as well…" NiGHTS was hovering in the air, staring down at the young dreamer and the owl. They floated down, extending their arm out to Juliet, "Well I'm certainly glad to see a friendly face here again. My name is, NiGHTS!"

"I'm Juliet," the teen nodded slightly when introducing herself to the jester.

"Say, the air in this Nightopia is pretty nice, it's been a while since I've been able to fly in such an open area!" NiGHTS beamed, flying a figure-8 in the sky.

Juliet looked around the area again, there were mountains in the

distance, and the water was still calm and bright. She looked back towards Owl, who was smiling as he watched NiGHTS flying around, almost like a proud parent. "Nightopia?" She finally asked.

"Nightopia is a world created by a visitors ideya. There are 5 ideya all together: purity, courage, wisdom, growth and hope. The Ideya you've managed to hold onto is your red ideya of courage, a very strong trait indeed. These ideya come from your inner heart, and they are what give this dimension life. Without them, well, you've seen..."

There was so much Juliet didn't understand. Another dimension? Ideya? Nightmaren? It almost seemed like a fantasy story to her.

"This place we are in now is Nightopia!" NiGHTS cheered, still flying around above the two. "It's a beautiful paradise where visitors dream in! Every Nightopia is different, and they all reflect a visitors deepest desires and heart."

"So, that red guy...Reala? He was after this Ideya? *My* Ideya?" NiGHTS and Owl both fell silent. You could only hear the wind blowing against the lilacs as they brushed against each other.

"You see, Juliet." NiGHTS voice dropped into a serious tone, it was a major change from the cheerful vibe the jester was giving off, even when Reala was threatening them. ". No visitors have come here as of recent, and Nightopia hasn't shown itself since. There was enough life in the Dream Gate to invite one more strong heart, and that heart must've been yours. That must be why you were able to stay as long as you have."

"M-me? No, no that can't be… I'm not strong, and I don't have any dreams! This was all a mistake!" Juliet stammered. She took a few steps back away from the jester, who was still flying closer to her.

"Hm… maybe not alone." NiGHTS sat in the air and thought for a minute. Owl and Juliet waited patiently for the jester to make their statement. "It would be hard, but I need a favor, Juliet."

"A favor? What is it, NiGHTS?" The dreamer asked, she seemed to be finally calming down.

"I think there's something strange going on in this world… something dark. You have a strong ideya of courage, but it may not be enough for just the two of us to overcome." NiGHTS seemed to be forgetting they were talking to Juliet, and trailed off into a mutter. Or was it NiGHTS? There was a loud ringing in Juliet's ear which began to block out everything NiGHTS was telling her, even her vision began to become blurry.

Everything NiGHTS was saying had been completely blocked out by the ringing. Everything went black, and Juliet could feel her body moving under the covers of her bed.

The Nightmaren General returned to their realm, frustrated and once again empty handed. They feared facing their new 'leader'; it was different from facing Wizeman. If Wizeman was displeased, he only threatened his creations, occasionally harming mere 2nd levels. Nightmayr was different: he was ruthless and brutal. Even the tiniest scratches on a maren's gem caused the worst pain imaginable, and Nightmayr enjoyed watching them crumble to the ground. It was almost like he hated all of them. Reala didn't know how Wizeman could create something even angrier than *he* was. Even NiGHTS, he could tell, did not find joy in hurting his own kind. It was obvious that Nightmayr was a Nightmaren, but his credibility to Wizeman was easily doubtful. Even the name he had chosen for himself simply felt like he was mocking them all.

Nightmayr's lair is a sunken, dark and cloudy gothic castle. The main courtyard of his nightmaren lair was a large open area, and the ground appeared to be a thick fog that was able to be walked upon by those who couldn't fly. It was much larger than a 2nd levels lair, although Reala wasn't quite sure of what level Nightmayr even was to their creator. Not a 1st, *that* was for sure.

Second-level domains were very hidden, usually. They all resided deep into Nightmare, but could have entrances anywhere. Nightmarens hide their entrances usually inside the Nightopia of a visitor, through the entrance they can easily turn any dream into a horrifying nightmare.

Reala flew to the large archway door of Nightmayr's castle. He was apprehensive of knocking on it, but he knew he had to get the

meeting over with. Reala flew back as the large door opened.

The interior was dark. The entrance was a smaller area, with two curved staircases leading to a balcony. Overhead was a large chandelier with black and blue tinted candles. It was beautiful to look at it, but it also gave Reala the chills a nightmaren should never get. Below the balcony, on the same level as the entrance were two more doors which led to a large ballroom. Reala wondered why a nightmaren would need a ballroom, but he figured it was for the aesthetic pleasure.

Reala flew up to the balcony, where there was a large throne, meant for Nightmayr. Reala thought *he* should be sitting there. There were two more staircases on either side, leading to the rest of the castle which Reala had never seen before.

There was a voice from the left stairway, which made Reala jump.

"Here so soon, Reala? I figured it would take you much longer to retrieve that ideya and get rid of another visitor. After all a visitor who refuses a visit from me isn't wanted here at all." Another Nightmaren flew down and sat on the throne. He was a longer figure compared to Reala, with white ram-like horns with a red and black striped pattern. A torn piece of Wizeman's cloak was pinned to his back like a cape. It was repulsive for Reala to look at. Nightmayr leaned on his hand, tapping his long claw-like fingers against his face. His eyes were like a soulless void to look into, even so they weren't as threatening to make contact with as Wizeman's were.

"Well, yes, you see Master Nightmayr about that…" before Reala could defend himself, Nightmayr growled loudly. Reala could tell by the look on Nightmayr's face that he wasn't going to hear the end of it from his *new* leader.

" *You didn't get it, did you?* " the lord hissed, sitting up in his throne and grabbing the two armrests tightly.

"It wasn't that simple! I knew I felt the presence of an ideya, but when I found the dreamer, she had *already* entered Nightopia, and met up with NiGHTS. It was too late the second she returned to the Dream Gate," Reala clenched his hands into a fist.

Nightmayr flew up from his throne and leaned in closer to Reala. "There's something else you're not telling me, Reala. Spit it out."

"If you must know… the ideya was a red ideya…"

"Yes? And?"

"None of us can...take it. It's the strongest ideya, only Wizeman himself can-"

There was a loud scream of anger, Nightmayr nearly clawed Reala across the face, but managed to stop himself hitting the ground instead. Reala flinched.

"I'm sorry, I don't know what to do. The visitor has found NiGHTS, they could ruin everything!"

"Let them," Nightmayr grunted, returning back to where his own throne was, "I *want* to see one small little visitor try to get in my way." get in my way."

Chapter 2

"Hey...NiGHTS?"

"What is it, Claris?"

"How big is the Night Dimension…?"

The nightmaren crossed his arms and turned away to think for a moment. "Well, I guess it depends on how you see it."

"What does that mean?" the familiar visitor looked up at her friend with a curious expression.

"Well there's Nightopia and Nightmare…" NiGHTS began, "of course there are many Nightopia's and also Nightmaren lairs… I don't think I have a definitive answer. There're lots of places I haven't been myself either."

"Oh…" Claris looked down, "I mean… is Nightopia and Nightmare it?"

"Can't say for sure," the jester sighed, "I like to pretend I know everything about the Night Dimension but there's a lot even I'm lost on. It's not like there's anyone to ask, either… I suppose Wizeman would know but good luck having a civil conversation with the God of Nightmares."

Claris and NiGHTS stayed quiet for a while after the visitor had chuckled at her friends joke. Claris pulled in her legs to her chest and leaned on her knees, rather frustrated in thought. NiGHTS hovered quietly over her, but spoke up suddenly.

"Well… I guess there's one place, kind of like a gate to Nightopia… it's just a rumor though. Never seen it for myself."

"A gate to… Nightopia?" Claris' interest perked slightly.

"A little nightopian once mentioned a place where dreamers could

hang out together in each others dreams," NiGHTS chuckled and began flying around in a circle, "Y'know like a gate that allowed you to go into Nightopia yourself."

"You speak Nightopian?" Claris laughed.

*"You **don't?** " The nightmaren joked back. Looking away from the dreamer, NiGHTS crossed their arms and began to think more. "It's just a story I've heard though. I've never seen anything like that before."*

"It sounds wonderful! Getting to see other visitors all the time I mean…"

"Apparently it's a bad sign… two people having the same dream could be dangerous. Maybe that's why, if it did exist, it had to be destroyed." NiGHTS noted.

"Still…" Claris smiled, "it would be nice getting to see Elliot in Nightopia again. I wonder what happened that night that allowed us to share a dream?"

"You ask a lot of questions, has anyone ever told you that?" The nightmaren grinned.

Claris ducked her head down, her face turning red. NiGHTS just laughed and held his hand out to the girl, " you both just happen to have a very strong Ideya of Courage, it can do amazing things. Why don't we go fly around a bit before the alarm egg catches you? I hear there's a secret underground cavern in these woods with a ton of treasure under it!"

"Let me guess, a little nightopian told you?" Claris smiled up at the inviting jester, taking their hand as the two assimilated together.

Juliet arrived at school early as her usual routine goes, spent time in the library, and then went to class taking her seat next to Alaia. The bell went off, and all the students took their seats as they prepared themselves for the longest 40 minutes of their lives. Some fell asleep, some were extremely attentive, and some were just doodling

the entire time. Juliet, however, was daydreaming about Nightopia. She thought about the beautiful fields of lavender next to the sea, and she could almost feel the breeze blowing and smell the strong lilac shrubs now.

Juliet was back in her Nightopia, skipping around and playing with the Nightopians that inhabited it. Everything was peaceful. Suddenly the Nightopians murmured to each other, and began to fly away. Juliet, confused, called to them, but they just kept flying. She turned around frowning, but lifted her eyes up to see another ghost-like nightmaren in front of her. It grinned, and rushed to her, startling the day dreamer, and sending her back to reality.

"Juliet! Juliet!" It was the voice of her teacher, "Please, read the next paragraph for us, that is if you can focus enough to do it."

Juliet looked around at the rest of the class, everyone was staring at her. She began to feel a little embarrassed, and looked down at the packet in front of her. "R-right. The next paragraph... which is?"

Her teacher gave a stern look, and for a moment Juliet thought she noticed a change in his eye form, "See me after class."

Juliet turned red in her seat and waited for the inevitable bell to signal the end of class. She always had a hard time focusing during the lesson, and it's only become worse with her recent adventures.

When the bell went off, Juliet awkwardly sat in her desk waiting for everyone else to file out of the room, leaving only her and her teacher standing there together.

"So… what did you want?" Juliet asked, standing up from her seat and throwing her backpack around her shoulder. She walked closer to her teacher, waiting for him to reply. He was facing the blackboard, but he wasn't writing anything. Juliet cautiously stepped forward, and peered over a bit to see more, and almost as if it was on cue, her teacher turned around with a malicious grin. Long pink extended claws were digging down on the chalkboard.

"I want your Ideya."

Juliet screamed as her teacher turned into a nightmaren before her. It looked similar to Reala, but with a white and black color scheme with a big cloud-like skirt. It's eyes were hollow, with little pink star-like pupils.

It rushed towards her, knocking over desks and pencil containers. The noises were so loud, she figured *someone* would have to hear.

Was she dreaming? She had to be, how else could a nightmaren be here? But the surroundings, it was all so real. It *was* real. The nightmaren chased Juliet around the classroom. Papers were flying all over the place, desks were being smashed together, and Juliet couldn't tell how loud it was over the sound of her panting.

She ran for the door, it was her only exit seeing as they were on the second floor, and it's not like she could simply fly away like the nightmaren currently pursuing her. She frantically pulled the door open, and pulled it back immediately as soon as she was out. She watched through the window as the nightmaren slammed into the door, disappearing on impact.

Juliet sighed in relief, but her breath was still shaky. She turned around from the door and had a de ja vu moment as she once again knocked herself right into another student.

This time they both fell over, and when Juliet's eyes finally adjusted after the stress she just dealt with she recognized the other as the same boy who helped her when she fell last time. Of course it was, could she ever catch a break?

He picked himself up before she did, and this time held his hand out for her, "You *really* do have a habit of doing that, don't you?"

She took his hand and got up on her feet, still a little shaken from the encounter, "Uh, yeah. I guess I do, sorry."

"You don't look so good, is everything okay?"

"I've gotta get to my next class…" she lied sheepishly, not wanting to be in the area anymore in case the nightmaren came back.

He stopped in front of her

"Want me to walk with you to the nurse? You look *really* pale. I have to go that way anyway, and I don't want you to faint and bump into someone again." He said in a joking manner, but Juliet could tell he was really concerned.

Juliet smiled and nodded. "Sure, if you don't mind that is." She didn't want to give anyone any trouble, but if they were both going the same way they'd be walking together either way. Plus, she *was* scared of fainting now that she thought about it. Surely the whole thing was a hallucination, right?

The two made it to the entrance of the nurses office, Juliet was already feeling a little better, but she still wanted to lay down for a bit and maybe have her mom come pick her up. She knew her mom would be angry at her for wanting to leave school, but after that encounter with the nightmaren she saw she doubted she could get through the rest of day.

"Um… I guess I'll see you later maybe," Juliet didn't have much to say, she didn't really know *what* to say. The only other person she talks to is Alaia.

"At this rate we will," he laughed.

To her savior, a group of boys down the hall started shouting in the direction, ending their conversation so she could leave.

"Yo, 'Taylor over here!"

Juliet peered over to see the group, "Are those your friends?" She asked, not really seeing any similarities. One of the boys made eye contact with her, and she swore she saw him grin.

He groaned, "I guess. Not really. I should go see what they want, though." He looked back hesitantly and started walking towards the group.

Juliet left to walk into the nurses office, several things still bothering her. The next time she saw NiGHTS, whenever that might be, she would be sure to bring it up with him.

Juliet didn't return to Nightopia that night, and she wondered if that

nightmaren being at her school had anything to do with it. How was that nightmaren able to escape into the real world? She thought all nightmares existed only...well… *within nightmares.* She told herself she'd bring it up with NiGHTS when she saw him again, but when would that be?

Nothing unusual at school had happened the next day either. All the staff members and the students went about their day completely oblivious to what Juliet had experienced. Even her English teacher was back at school like nothing had ever happened. What even *did* happen? What if she was just imagining everything?

She even tried to look up any mentions of 'Ideya' or 'Nightopia' online, but every search result came up empty handed. Owl had implied other visitors to that world existed, it was impossible that she was the only one who has. Surely if other people visited this place as often as it sounded, it would be more common knowledge, right?

Luckily today at school she had a break, today was her study hall day. Instead of catching up on school work, though, she was hoping to catch up on some sleep.

She turned around to see the other kids in her break. Most were already in their friend groups or cliques. There were some boys in the front making paper airplanes and throwing them at another group of girls who were all on their phones making faces at each other.

Juliet usually sat alone in the back of the room, but it was hard to find some real quiet anywhere in the room in order to focus, and especially to fall asleep. Today was different tho, during her survey of the available seats left she noticed the familiar face of the boy she keeps running into. She never noticed him in this room in the past, and no one seemed to be sitting around him. Maybe she would postpone her nap for later.

"Looks like we have a class together. And this time I'm *not* on the floor this time." She said taking a seat next to him, trying to break the ice a little bit.

He jumped a bit, yelping a bit and quickly covering his mouth as

their peers turned to look at them, then going back to whatever they were doing before.

"Sorry, you startled me," he confessed.

"Like that wasn't obvious already," Juliet laughed, shifting a bit in her seat as she took out her agenda to look over her homework. "Hey by the way, I don't think I ever caught your name. I just realized I never really said thank you for helping me before."

He looked a little embarrassed at the mention and sat up from his slouch. "Uh yeah, I have a habit of forgetting that. It's Will."

"I'm Juliet. It's nice to officially meet you."

The period went on, and Juliet noticed Will had quite the pile of work to catch up on. She inched over a bit and peered over his shoulder.

"I'm guessing math isn't your best subject..." Juliet acknowledged.

"This? Oh, yeah. I mean, it's not that. I'm good at math, I just haven't really had time to work on school, I'm kinda far behind. I used to be really good but… I guess not so much lately. I'm actually not in this study hall I just… needed a place to get some work done right now."

"Well… I don't mean to intrude on anything but math is one of my best subjects right now. Maybe I could help you catch up after school?"

Will looked at her and smiled a bit, "Uh, sure if you wouldn't mind. We could stay after school in the library?"

"Sure! My parents would be more than happy to kick me out for a few hours if it meant extra studying." Juliet laughed.

Just as the two had promised, they met up after school in the library. The library was a rather small section of the school, but it was a nice quiet place to study. While on her walk down to it, she began to notice the changing colors on the trees while spacing out of the window. It was getting colder out as October came, but colors always make it bearable. Autumn was Juliet's favorite season. It was never too cold or too warm, and there was *always* apple cider in the

house. Bellbridge is the best place to be during this season; Halloween isn't as big in Europe as it is in America, but this city is known to go all out for it to try and spread the festivities. No one is really sure why it's so big in this town. The colder seasons are the busiest in Bellbridge, and during October there's always something to do. There's pumpkin carvings, haunted houses, and tons of parties to go to. Juliet never got the chance to go to anything, though. She never had anyone to go with.

After about an hour of math, a buzz sound went off that vibrated the whole table. "Sorry," Will said, picking up his phone. Juliet heard him whisper a silent 'uh oh' before answering the call.

She tried to tune out the conversation, not wanting to be an eavesdropper or anything, but she did hear a 'yeah' and an 'okay' every second or two. Finally he ended the call and started to put everything away. He seemed really annoyed.

"Sorry I need to leave so soon, that was my sister. I gotta go to some dumb halloween party with her," he rolled his eyes.

"It's fine! We're pretty much done with the recent stuff anyway." The mention of the halloween party made her remember she completely forgot about asking Alaia about going. It was in the city, always held on the first week of October and a ton of kids from school were going to be there, even if it was a school night. After the two finished packing up for the day, she ran home to call Alaia as fast as she could, hoping it wouldn't be too last minute for her.

Maria Taylor returned home after another day at work, and was utterly exhausted. She couldn't wait to collapse on the sofa and sleep the rest of the afternoon until dinner time. Her coat pocket buzzed, and she sighed as she took out her phone, wondering who was bothering her now.

hey u home frm work yet?

yeah, just got off why

i need ur opinion on what to

wear 2night.

tonight? where are u going?

isnt the party 2night?

babe did u forget lol

"Ah, shit!" Maria cursed out loud, slamming her phone down. She rushed into the kitchen to check the calendar. She had completely forgotten about the halloween party, and that she and Myles were going to tonight.

oh no i totally forgot

lmao of course u did ;)

whats that supposed to mean lmao?

i guess i should start getting ready since

it's in a few hours :/

if u wanna cancel thts fine we can

do smthin else :)

no i want to go! everyone else is

gonna be there haha ive been

looking forward to it for a while

shit i never even talked to my dad

yet

wtf ur 19 he doesnt need 2 kno

nah if i dont tell him he'll freak!

He's allowed to come home and leave

whenever he wants but god forbid i do

Maria opened a new conversation with her dad to ask about the party. She hated speaking on the phone with him. He asks way too many questions.

hey dad im going to a party tonight

with myles so if you come home tonight

and im not home thats where i am

Where is this party?

And the questions begin.

its the big halloween one downtown tonight

i went last year

Who's going with you?

taylors taking me and were meeting up with

raya abigail and tyler

Is he driving you there? How

are you getting home.

This was tedious. Maria was pressing her phones keyboard harder and harder each text.

yes, taylors driving here and back. party ends

at like 2am

You're not staying out that late.

You have work tomorrow.

yeah at like noon? :/

Ok.

Is your brother going.

no i dont think so. ?

Take him with you.

I don't want him staying home

alone so late.

dad hes nearly fucking 16 hes fine

No.

Watch your language.

Either take him with you or

don't go.

It's a school night so be

home by 10.

Maria threw her head back into the sofa and groaned. Why did her dad have to make everything so difficult? She knew there was no way to get him to change his mind, though. Now she had to go get ready in a bad mood.

When Juliet got home she immediately ran into her room for some privacy. She dialed Alaia's number and waited for her friend to pick up.

"Heeeeeello?" Alaia answered, you could hear her smiling.

"Alaia! I know this is super last minute but I was wondering if you wanted to maybe go to that Halloween party tonight?" Juliet's face was hot.

"Aw…. I thought you had more info on that dream you had." Alaia sounded a bit too disappointed for someone who was just asked out

on a date, at least a date in Juliet's mind.

"Oh…. yeah sorry. I promise I'll fill you in once I've figured some things out, okay?" Juliet twiddled her thumbs, getting a bit anxious, "What about the party, though?"

"Oh of course! I think it'll be fun."

Juliet wasn't convinced. Alaia didn't sound excited at all. They never were a big fan of Halloween, or at least never got into the spirit. Alaia used to live in London, so they never grew up with it all until they moved to Bellbridge when they were 11. Juliet was their first friend here. And now she felt like she bothered them with asking.

"Well ok but… I guess if the party gets to be too much we could go to the FullMoon cafe down the block. It'll be a lot calmer there." Juliet tried to make up for the bad invitation.

Alaia just laughed, "Alright, but I think the party sounds fun tonight. I don't have a costume, though."

"Oh! I don't have one either… it's optional. Most people don't go with them anyway, it's just a fun way to start off October."

"Right, okay! I'll see you there I guess."

Juliet hung up the phone and let out a big sigh of relief. She hoped things would go well tonight. Alaia was her still her friend, but she almost wanted to be something more. She loved being around her, and she hoped she felt the same way back.

The ride to the party that night was agonizing. Juliet kept thinking about how maybe this was all a mistake. Maybe she should call Alaia right now and just cancel. What if she made a fool of herself and Alaia hates her after? This was going to be a long night.

At the party, they met up outside near one of the benches. Alaia wasn't in full costume, but had just thrown on a lace black dress and some cat ears to match. Juliet, on the otherhand, was wearing her homemade bat costume she was working on for the past month on her own time. She felt embarrassed seeing how casual Alaia was dressed up, she was so excited to show off her costume after all,

Halloween was her favorite holiday.

The inside of the warehouse where the party was being held had been covered ceiling to floor in orange and black party decorations. There were bats hanging from the ceiling, streamers thrown all over the walls, there were even bat shaped balloons. The lighting made it hard to see where you were going, and you bumped into people a lot. There were tons of snacks including cupcakes, cookies, fruit trays, soda, and popcorn, the food was always Juliet's favorite part of events. If she could spend the whole time by the snack table, she would.

Most of the songs played were those big Halloween hits that play every other 2 songs that you really start to get sick of, but she still had fun hearing them every time they played. Alaia seemed to be enjoying it too, which made Juliet feel a lot better about the whole night.

After a night of continuous plays of Monster Mash and Ghostbusters the final song played was a slow dance. Many people left the dance floor, mostly single people. Juliet chuckled to herself but froze up as she felt Alaia's hand grab her and pull her out onto the dance floor

Juliet was having the time of her life as she and Alaia continued to dance. Step by step the two became the couple of the night, and she couldn't have been happier. Juliet had been lost in thought, breathing steadily, and all she imagined was the two of them dancing in her Nightopia together. However, when Juliet looked around, she was alone dancing in her Nightopia, but she could still feel Alaia's touch.

Juliet continued waltzing around under the lilac trees, and slowly began forgetting about the party. Lost in thought, Juliet ended up tripped on Alaia's feet and her stumbling woke her back into reality. "Ahh, I'm sorry!" she flustered, "I was just-"

"It's okay!" Alaia grinned, "I noticed you dazing off a bit. Why don't I go get us something to drink and take a break?"

Juliet's smile faded slightly, "yeah, sure… I guess we could sit for a moment."

Alaia winked and left the dance floor, getting lost in the crowd. Juliet awkwardly stepped backwards towards the wall away from the rest of the people worried about standing in the way. As she stepped back she felt a nudge on her shoulder that perked her up.

"Ah, sorry," it was an older girl, one who seemed familiar to Juliet. She was wearing a mouse themed animal mask that matched the rest of the costume she dressed in. "I didn't mean to startle you, I just couldn't help but to notice how *adorable* your costume was!" She spoke in compliments, but her tone had malicious intent behind it.

"Oh… thank you.." She looked down, turning red at the attention. "I think I overdressed a bit but.."

"Not at *all* !" The girl grinned, "are you here *alone* ?"

Juliet shook her head as the other girl leaned in closer, an uncomfortable amount, "No I'm with my friend, we're just taking a break."

"I'm here with my friends too," she lightly placed her hand on Juliet's wrist. It was a delicate touch, but still made Juliet feel rather frozen in place.

Another kid snuck up to her, a boy with dark hair. He wasn't wearing a full costume, but had a matching lion mask of the type the girl was wearing. "Come on, stop teasing her," he rolled his eyes.

"Sorry I uh… should probably go find my friend she should be back soon," Juliet tried to sneak away from the situation, but the girl's once delicate grip on her wrist tightened quickly.

"Oh she's a little busy right now," another boy, much younger than the other seemed to pop out of nowhere next to her flipping over an empty cup, "she got a little wet, might be a few minutes."

The strange kids started backing Juliet up towards one of the exits of the building. She wasn't quite sure what to do, would anyone hear her over the music if she called for help? Did she even need to call for help? They were just kids… but kids she definitely didn't know.

"H-hey…" she managed to speak up as the girl tugged on her arm through the door, "I really shouldn't be leaving I should wait-"

"We won't be long," the older boy made direct eye contact with her as he smiled, "we just want to have a friendly chat, to your own benefit."

She wasn't sure what he meant by that, but it was already too late to wonder. The group dragged her outside of the party and a little bit away from the stragglers outside.

The girl let go of Juliet as she frantically pulled her hand to herself, looking around nervously at the three kids around her. "What… do you want?"

The older boy stepped forward first, signaling to Juliet that he seemed to be their leader of sorts. His hands were placed in his pockets, and despite the situation had a seemingly calm composure, a major contrast to the trembling Juliet was undergoing.

"First, I wanna ask you... how do you feel about Nightopia?"

Will had been sitting on the outer edge of the room; he had mostly been on his phone the whole time trying to avoid eye contact with anyone else there. Maria came, left him here, and went off to do her own thing. He had no clue where she was, but honestly he didn't care.

The place was really hot. There were so many people, and it was too crowded. Not to mention all the lights that blind you if you stare at them for less than a second. He was wearing a huge black hoodie, so as usual he didn't prepare for how hot it was going to be here. The music was also really loud and annoying to listen to. It was miserable.

Will decided to wait outside the rest of the time. Maria probably wouldn't even notice he was gone and he could honestly walk home if they weren't all the way out in the city. He got up after sitting for about 2 hours and began to walk over to the exit, thinking about how much nicer it would be outside. He wasn't anticipating the crowd to the door, and the flashing lights were making it hard to see, and he

collided with another person leaving the dance floor. Both fell to the ground.

He immediately began to apologize profusely and got up to help the other person up. It was like that girl at school was contagious, he thought to himself.

"It-it's fine! It's kind of hard to watch where you're going in here," the girl laughed and looked right back at Will.

Their eyes made direct contact, and something sparked in Will's mind. Memories began to flood his mind all at once, and it was overwhelming to take in. The girls eyes widened back at him, and they both sat there motionless staring at each other.

"Will…?" she gasped.

"Helen…?"

The two helped each other up while in shock, not just about seeing each other, but about *forgetting* each other.

Peering over Helen's shoulder, something else grabbed Will's attention. He caught a glimpse of Juliet being escorted out of the party by a group of kids… something felt off about it. Especially knowing the type of person she is at school. He stepped aside Helen to her confusion, "hang on, sorry. Be right back."

"Wait!" She called as he walked past her over to the door, following him closely "where are you going? There's so much we have to-"

He turned around to shush her as they left through the exit, following the group of kids. Helen concerningly quieted down, looking around to see what the fuss was about but was unable to pick up on what it was. Outside they weaved through a few crowds of people hanging outside the party and Will was able to spot Juliet with the crowd of kids over on the side. He was about to run over to intervene, but after catching a bit of their conversation Helen tugged on him and the two snuck to the side to listen in instead.

"...Nightopia?" Juliet replied, not quite letting her guard down just yet. Something about the kids energy still didn't feel right.

"Yeah," the boy grinned, "see, we're all friends here. I mean, if you want that is."

"If I want…? What does that mean?"

"It means *depending* on what side you're on," the girl demanded behind her.

"...Side?" She glanced behind her momentarily before looking back at the other boy. Now where was this going?

"Well… we know you've been visiting Nightopia. We're Visitors too, interesting, right? I bet NiGHTS told you he hasn't seen any Visitors other than you."

"You know NiGHTS…?"

The boy ignored her, "that's cause we got our own little thing going on. 'Nightmare Immunity' you could call it. You interested?"

"Nightmare...Immunity?"

This time her question wasn't ignored, "exactly what it sounds like! You could stay in Nightopia, flying around with NiGHTS all you want… but the Nightmaren aren't exactly happy about that. So that's why we're here," he crossed his arms confidently, "we wanna invite you to our team, you'll be on *their* side."

"Their side? Does that mean..!?"

"Duh," the younger boy responded sarcastically, "we work for the leader of the Nightmaren. He's so cool…!"

"He helped us," the girl smiled, "and he can help you, too. As long as you get away from that annoying jester and owl. He will welcome you with open arms, he was originally expecting you, after all. Don't know *why* ."

"Expecting me…?" Juliet recalled the voice she had heard on her first night in the Dream Gate. A voice that seemed confused at her... could that be what they are referring to? Who was this leader of Nightmare?

The older boy extended out his hand to Juliet. She stared at it nervously, unsure of what to do. Be… with the Nightmaren? What did they want with *her*?

"Hey!" To Juliet's shock, a very familiar voice called over. Running over to her was Will, behind him was a girl Juliet never had seen before.

Will pushed himself between Juliet and the other boy, grabbing her hand and started pulling her away, "hey everyone's waiting for you at the café, come on!"

Obviously, to her relief, the two of them were trying to remove Juliet from the situation. Their rushed excuse was enough to confuse the other group of kids long enough to catch some distance between them as they hurried across the street to FullMoon Café, running through the door. The other girl Juliet didn't know looked through the glass door to see if the group of Nightmare Kids were gone, to her surprise they completely vanished.

Juliet took a seat down in a booth, hiding herself from the window just in case. Will took a seat across from her.

"Thanks…" she sighed, the redness in her face finally fading away, "sorry about that… did you… hear a lot?" The two kids now sitting next to each other across from her exchanged uncertain glances with each other.

Chapter 3

Claris Sinclair was always a curious person. She was never satisfied with a simple answer, and had to figure out things out for herself. After talking to NiGHTS about the Night Dimension, Claris was determined to find out more. The only problem was that she got nervous when doing things alone, and figured NiGHTS wouldn't be much help. He seemed very sure of himself that the Gate of Dreams didn't exist anymore.

She spent the afternoon wandering around town. Seeing all the people and busy city life always gave her inspiration, but she was also just looking for an excuse to drop by the basketball court.

It was sad she couldn't see Elliot where they first met, with all the weird laws of Nightopia. They were lucky enough to run into each other in the Waking World, and there they remained good friends. No one else knows they stopped the plans of a God to infiltrate the Waking World together, and no one ever will.

There were a group of boys playing in the court. All shouting, running around, and throwing friendly insults back and forth at each other. One of the boys was recognizable as Elliot, and Claris smiled when she walked by and the two made eye contact.

Elliot said something to his friends, and ran over to the fence to greet Claris. "What's up?"

"Hey, I wanna talk to you about something… will your buddies mind if you ditch for a little bit?"

Elliot left his current game and met Claris outside of the court. She sat down with him on a bench that observed it and began explaining to him what NiGHTS had said to her last night.

"A gate of your dreams? Sounds kinda far fetched if you ask me."

"But there's a possibility it's real! How cool would that be? We could see each other in Nightopia again if that was the case!" Claris

jumped up in excitement.

"How do you plan on finding it though? If it was real, something happened. Maybe it was even destroyed, Claris. It might be a lost cause." Elliot was trying to rationalize while dribbling his basketball to think.

"We won't know unless we actually look," she protested. "I was thinking about it all morning, there could be more to the Night Dimension than just Nightopia and Nightmare."

"Well I mean…. does it really matter?" Elliot stopped mid-dribble, tucking the ball under his arm again. Claris shot up, a bit surprised at Elliot's sudden change of view. "I mean… we go to Nightopia when we sleep…. fly around a bit…. and then wake up. Why should it matter to us what else goes on? It's a bit nosy to me, even NiGHTS obviously doesn't care at all either, and he lives there."

This bothered her quite a bit. Did Elliot really not care about the other mysteries of the dream world? Did he just not have the same curious mind as Claris? She was about to protest, but it hit her that maybe Elliot was just too scared to get involved. Elliot always masked his inner emotions with different ones, and it was hard to tell what he was really thinking most of the time. Their final encounter with Wizeman definitely shook him up more than it did her, she could tell.

Well, that knocked Elliot down on her list. Who else would she talk to? Should she go ahead and see what NiGHTS thinks? There had to be someone who would help her.

That night, Claris tried to get to bed at a reasonable time, if it weren't for the fact she was tossing in her bed having trouble getting to sleep. There was a huge thunderstorm that night, and Claris hated the loud crashes of thunder.

Finally the dreamer entered sleep and found herself in the familiar Spring Valley, the dream of ideal. Everything in the nightopia seemed normal. The nightopians were singing a joyous tune, and there were no nightmarens to be seen since she and NiGHTS had rid of them.

NiGHTS…. where were they? Claris got worried, maybe she had bothered NiGHTS too much. Would he be coming tonight? Maybe he would rather be with Elliot...

Dark clouds began forming over the distant blue sky of the dream, spreading darkness over the valley, as if the storm occurring in the waking world had entered the dreaming. The nightopians chirped and began to fly away, and Claris just watched as the atmosphere of the once sunny nightopia turned cold and rainy almost instantly. The rivers were running fast and began to overflow, bringing with it several nightopians.

Claris began to jog away, which turned into a run, and eventually a full out sprint. The ground became muddy from the rain, causing Claris to slip and tumble down one of the many valleys. She picked herself up and looked down at her now mud covered clothes.

Was she… having a nightmare?

A bolt of lightning quickly struck down right at the feet of the dreamer, and before Claris had time to react, a voice boomed like thunder in her ear.

"For a visitor who faced Wizeman himself, you scare pretty easily."

Claris shuddered, but slowly opened her eyes to view the creature in front of her. Her hair had been swept into her face from the rain, and she could barely open her eyes into a squint from the drops hitting her face.

The dreamer managed to get a small glance up, and was greeted by a sparkling blue cat-like eye glaring back.

"...NiGHTS?" Claris whispered, recognizing those blue eyes anywhere.

"NiGHTS? NiGHTS!" The newcomer broke out into a raspy cackle. "I mean, I'm honored, really. Truly I am. Ah… let me clear things up." There was another burst of lightning across the dream. The rain stopped, and the sun began to break through the dark clouds. Claris was still soaked from head to toe and covered in mud, but she wiped

her soaken strands of hair out of her eyes, and got a better look at her new acquaintance.

They were a similar appearance to NiGHTS, with two long jagged horns drooping down to their torso. Their bright neon yellow color almost blinded Claris, but it contrasted well the hues of blues lining their outfit.

"Sorry about the entrance back there, I like to make a good first impression. Anyway, you wanted to know about the Dream Plaza, correct?" Claris was too in shock to respond. She stared wide eyed in disbelief at the obvious Nightmaren.

"The… Dream Plaza?" she managed to stutter out.

"The gate of dreams?"

"How did you know I wanted to…"

"A little mepian told me. So, you ready to explore?" This nightmaren seemed rather optimistic and friendly for someone who tried to tear a nightopia from it seams a few minutes ago. They grabbed the dreamers wrist and began to fly up.

"W-wait!" Claris shrieked, "Who are you! NiGHTS never mentioned anything about other 1st level Nightmaren, neither did Wizeman!"

"He didn't? Well Wizemans just a bit modest with some of his better creations I guess," the flier smirked to themselves. "They call me Jolten, and today I will be your guide through the wonders of the dream world." They pulled Claris up higher to them, throwing the dreamer on their back as she clasped on tightly. "Please keep your hands and feet inside at all times, and no moving about the cabin."

Jolten began to take off and Claris shrieked once again, "W-wait again! I still don't know you! And why aren't we dualizing?"

"Dualizing? Ah- oh! Right… I, uh… tend to not dualize! I don't like the feeling, yeah…." Jolten stuttered. "Anyway, I think this is a lot more fun, eh? As long as you don't let go we'll be fine."

Claris didn't know what to think. First this Nightmaren acted as if it

was attacking her, and then it's trying to be her friend? For all she knew, Jolten could be flying her right into Nightmare. Deciding to push away her doubts, the dreamer agreed to fly with Jolten. This could be exactly what she wished for.

"Hoo, my! I haven't seen you this energetic since you first found the Dream Gate!" Owl commented as NiGHTS ecstatically flew around the mentioned area. The jester happily glided through the trees and giggled as they flew down to touch the water.

"I'm just so excited to see what happens! That new visitor sure is something, I wonder what other kinds of dreams she has! She reminds me of the last one. I wonder what ever happened to him..."

"Well well that's all to find out later. We must focus on more important things right now! Yes, the new dreams are exciting but it is still not enough to hold this place together! Wizeman left us in quite the predicament according to you." Owl reminded the nightmaren.

NiGHTS stopped mid-flight and returned back to the main hub. They could feel the Dream Gate slowly breaking apart. "You're right… but I don't know what to do. I have no idea what shape the Dark Realm is in either… I know this place wasn't meant to hold up forever but it's just too soon."

"Hoo well I didn't mean to bring you down again! I was just stating facts, is all. All we can do is rely on the visitor. Even so, we don't know if she will be successful with her task."

"Do you think she'll be able to bring them here, Owl? It's been decades since they were here, it feels like, who knows if they're even around anymore. But maybe her ideya could call them back or something!" NiGHTS grinned. "I wish I had more time to give her their names, but all she needs to do is ask around to see if anyone knows a 'NiGHTS'!"

"I think she'll be fine. Who knows, maybe instead we'll get some fresh dreamers," Owl chuckled, letting out a typical 'hoo!' at the end.

NiGHTS just nodded and flew back up into the air, getting a few more laps around the hub, he had a lot of time to spare.

They wondered how Reala was doing right now. No, how all of *Nightmare* was doing. Wizeman was gone…. how were they surviving? Maybe Reala was leading them. NiGHTS shuddered at the thought.

NiGHTS had just cleared his mind of things when they heard Owl yelp from below. The old bird had been shaken off his perch. The nightmaren retreated to the surface, and felt the tremors beginning. They heard a loud crash behind them, and apprehensively looked back to see the large staircase begin to fall apart and crash to the ground.

The Dream Gate had begun to collapse.

The trio at the Cafe decided to ease the tension a bit to let Juliet calm herself a bit by letting Helen introduce herself to her. Juliet didn't recognize her from their school so she wondered how she and Will knew each other, they didn't really seem like the type of people to be friends with one another.

Helen had ordered a tea to not seem rude as they took up one of the booths. The cafe was fairly empty, since most kids who hang out there were currently at the ongoing Halloween Party across the street.

"Ok, Juliet…" Helen smiled. "I guess we should ask you what happened back there, right? With those kids?"

"I don't know," Juliet muttered. Falling back into the seat in defeat, "I don't really think you'd understand.

Will and Helen glanced at each other and smiled a bit. "Try us."

"If it helps, we'll start things off." Helen stated. "What's your involvement with Nightmare?"

"Nightmare?" She shouted, causing a few adult heads sitting at the bar to turn in their direction. Juliet slumped down further into the seat. "Nightmare? " she said quieter.

"Those kids mentioned Nightmaren, and there's only one type of Nightmaren that we know of so, what's your connection to the Night Dimension? Assuming you have one… if you don't this will be a pretty awkward conversation now." Will explained.

Juliet's anxiety flew away, maybe this would be easier than she thought. "Uh, yes. It's only recently, though. I actually have never heard about Nightmare before to be honest, but it would make sense it's connected I guess."

"Well, what's going on? Who were those other kids? Other visitors you know?"

"I wish I could tell you," Juliet sighed, "I haven't seen any of them before tonight." she shuddered.

"You don't have to worry okay? We've been through all this… sorta. We used to visit Nightopia all the time, it's how we met actually." Will smiled, trying to calm Juliet down more. Helen just rolled her eyes at him.

"I was wondering why I've never heard anyone mention Nightopia before and I thought I was going crazy, I guess it's nice to know other people *have* been there too."

"See? We all get it here," Helen reassured Juliet, "what can you tell us, though? It's um… been a while for the two of us. Those kids just kind of freaked us out a bit when we overheard what they were talking about."

She took a deep breath in, "ok, well. I guess from what I remember him telling me is that Nightopia is dying because people aren't visiting anymore. Apparently it's the Nightmarens fault…. but I don't know how those kids back at the party tie into all of this. All I know is that ever since I first went to that place weird things have been happening in real life... " Juliet looked over at Will, "Remember when we ran into each other in the hall? Well, a Nightmaren was just in the classroom attacking m-"

Both of her new friends burst out laughing. Was she missing something?

"What?" Juliet snapped in frustration.

"Nightmaren are… *nightmaren* . They can't come to the *waking world* , let alone survive in it long enough to attack." Will said, trying to keep a straight face.

"Then how else do you explain that mess of a classroom? I was being chased! It said it wanted my ideya, why don't you two believe me?" She was getting frustrated

Helen continued laughing, "Ideya is dream energy. It's not even *in* the waking world

physically. Maybe you just fell asleep in class and had a bad dream?"

"Well, I mean I *did* fall asleep in class but that has nothing to do with this… ask Will, he saw me afterwards!"

Will slowly stopped laughing, "Alright, I guess you do have a point there. So let's just say, hypothetically, a nightmaren *was* in the waking world. How and why is it here?"

"I don't know...I meant to ask him about it, but…"

"Him?" Helen asked, "Who's 'him'?"

"Oh, uh. A friend I met in Nightopia, his name's NiGHTS."

The two started laughing again.

"What's so funny this time?" Juliet cried.

"No, nothing. It's a good laugh." Helen chuckled, "NiGHTS was our friend, too."

"Really?" Juliet jumped out of her seat, "I'm sure he'd be so happy to see you two again! What happened?"

The duo's laughing went silent, and both looking at each other awkwardly.

"What is it…?" She lowered her posture.

"We *did* forget… a lot. I don't know if it's even possible for us to return." Helen frowned.

"Tonight! Tonight I'll talk to NiGHTS. I'm sure it's possible. I mean if *I'm* able to visit, you know?"

The two looked at each other nervously again. There was something they weren't telling Juliet, she could tell.

"How about we all talk again some other time? If we can't go back to Nightopia, there could still be a way for us to help out here. That group of kids still have me a bit nervous," Helen admitted.

Will looked up at Juliet, "You have my number right? Just text me if something comes up. Don't worry about it too much though, okay?"

Juliet was confused, but agreed. She still didn't understand what was going on, but she just couldn't wait to go to Nightopia and tell NiGHTS about his meeting his other friends.

Juliet arrived in her nightopia, Lilac Valley, but no one was in sight except for a few nightopians picking flowers.

Her arrival felt a little different this time, she didn't remember passing through the Dream Gate. It was almost as if her unconscious had simply led her into her Nightopia instead.

"NiGHTS? Hey NiGHTS, I'm back!" Juliet called. Nothing.

The nightopians started crying. And the wind picked up, blowing away their bouquet they had picked. Juliet jumped up and caught them before they got too far, and bent over to return the flowers to the crying nightopians. They only shook their heads, and pushed the flowers back to her. "For me? Thank you!" she smiled.

"Hey, Juliet!" a familiar voice called from above.

"NiGHTS! Oh thank goodness, NiGHTS I have awesome news!"

"Me first. Juliet…" NiGHTS flew down to the visitors' height, he had

a grim expression, "Though I don't think it's 'awesome', The Dream Gate is gone… it fell apart last night."

"Oh no…" Juliet gasped.

"Owl and I are taking refuge in an old abandoned dream site. I hoped I'd never have to see that place again…"

"Hey, NiGHTS don't worry! I have *good news* ! I met your old friends tonight!"

NiGHTS face lit up, "you did? How?! Oh my, it's been so long since I've seen them!" the jester shouted happily, bursting up into the air.

"Yeah, Will and Helen! We were at a party and… well I need to tell you about that too. But now you don't really need me anymore I guess!"

NiGHTS froze in the air, "what?"

"I… I found your old friends… Will and Helen?"

"I… I don't know.."

"But, they sure seem to know you?"

NiGHTS held his breath, "Really?"

"Uh...yes?"

NiGHTS flew back down to Juliet, "Hey, Juliet. I never asked you if you've ever wanted to fly. You know, if we dualize, you can fly around yourself! How cool is that! Come on!"

"NiGHTS I don't understand… what's wrong? What are you acting like that?"

"Acting like what?" NiGHTS chuckled, he had a big grin on his face, "come on, let's go fly together!" NiGHTS held his hand out to Juliet.

"Well, if you're not going to tell me what's going on, then I'm just going to keep going," she crossed her arms, "I met a group of kids

tonight… they're visitors too, but apparently they dream in Nightmare...they talked about following the 'Ruler of Nightmare' or something..."

"Well that doesn't make sense," NiGHTS frowned, "did they say anything else?"

"Just that they wanted me to join them… but I don't know for what."

"Hmm… I'll see if Owl knows anything, he knows more about what Visitors arrive here more than I do. For now, why don't you just spend some time in your Nightopia. You deserve a peaceful night after what happened it seems."

Juliet nodded, "yeah! I could really use it. Why don't we go see what the Nightopians are up to?"

"Those little guys are always up to something! It looks like a ton of them are gathered around the lake." NiGHTS began to swivel around in the air, gesturing for Juliet to follow him down.

Juliet carefully headed down the hill they had been conversing on previously towards the lake at the heart of the Nightopia. The bright aqua water contrasted nicely with the greens and purples of the rest of the world. A bunch of Nightopians were bopping around in the water, and splashing each other in the shallow end. One Nightopia flew up to NiGHTS and Juliet and began to tug on the visitor's shirt.

"I think he wants to play!" NiGHTS beamed.

"You speak Nightopian?" Juliet joked. NiGHTS just chuckled back fondly.

The Nightopian flew back over to the water and dunked himself in, staring back at Juliet with it's wide eyes. Juliet was about to approach the water when a loud rumbling echoed from under the surface. The center of the lake began to swirl into a small vortex, sweeping several Nightopian away with it.

"Looks like play time is going to have to wait, as well as your relaxing night," NiGHTS panicked.

"What's going on? NiGHTS how do we save them!"

"There's a lot of power I have that you haven't seen yet, Juliet. You're about to get a front row seat!" He winked.

"What does that mean?" Juliet asked looking up at her twirling friend.

NiGHTS clapped his hands and a bright light flashed before Juliet's eyes. NiGHTS had transformed himself into a sailboat, big enough only for Juliet to ride and steer. The sailboat splashed into the lake as Juliet watched in shock.

She snorted, NiGHTS had a lot of crazy things about him but this was one she definitely wasn't expecting, "NiGHTS you can turn into a sailboat!?"

"I can do a lot more than that!" The boat spoke back to her, "but there's time for that later. We need to savel in those Nightopians before they get swept under the water into the mouth of whatever nightmaren is hiding under that thing! Just steer me towards them, and I can handle it from there!"

Juliet nodded without asking any more questions. She found herself able to adapt rather quickly to growing knowledge about the Night Dimension, nothing really surprised her anymore after this point.

The visitor leapt up onto the swaying sailboat, grabbing hold of the purple colored sail. With wind picking up, Juliet steered the sailboat towards the center of the lake towards the swirling Nightopians.

With NiGHTS' help, she swiveled around in the water and managed to reach one of the Nightopians. The fairy was crying for help as it helplessly splashed around the water vortex, luckily NiGHTS had managed to grab it in time and the Nightopian was pulled up onto the boat. The nightopian began to giggle as it sat on NiGHTS, immediately forgetting the peril it was recently in. Funny little creatures they were, she thought.

Juliet continued to steer in the nightopians as NiGHTS grabbed onto them, and the two managed to stop every single fairy before they fell

through the swirling water. Another rumble echoed ripples through the lake before the water turned calm once again, and Juliet glanced around in worry.

"So… is it over?"

NiGHTS lept from under Juliet as they reached the shore and transformed back into his original form, "we fished all the nightopians out from the water, so whatever was down there decided nothing else here was worth it I suppose."

"Was it a nightmaren?" Juliet asked with concern.

"Probably, and it'll probably be back too. I wonder what it wants… it's not like their creator is around to send them out anymore." NiGHTS mumbled to himself, but was loud enough for Juliet to hear.

Whatever it was, it ruined her once night of peace after the fiasco that was the Halloween dance. Now all she wanted to do was sleep in.

"Come on, 'mayr we didn't do *that* bad. It's not our fault she has *friends* ." Marcus. He and the rest of the kids were all relaxing around the large throne where Nightmayr sat. The leader didn't look happy, that was for sure.

"If you ask me you probably took too long getting to the point. You should've just gone to see her in Nightopia when that annoying little pixie wasn't looking," Nightmayr was glaring straight at Marcus.

"They're *always* together, though. Come on we were having fun! I've never been a party before, don't blame us because Marcus can't talk to girls."

"Morgan!" Marcus stood up clenching his fists. Another girl was standing over on the side, just chuckling to herself, her hands tucked inside her jacket pockets.

The room was silent, Nightmayr looked at the three sternly and Marcus shifted a bit, starting to feel uncomfortable and guilty.

"Alice, I thought you said you had this under control from the start,"

Nightmayr rubbed his temples.

Alice crossed her arms and pouted, "Maybe if *someone* had joined us as a lookout we would've had more time!"

"Speak of the *someone* ," the other girl keeping her distance called as another boy showed up and joined the group."Nice of you to finally show up for once."

"Oh can it, Uma. For *once* ," he muttered.

"No, let Uma speak," Nightmayr frowned, "moving on, as long as you can all keep an eye on her in some way in the Waking World. I have some sneaky suspicions she won't be alone for very long after tonight's event. NiGHTS *does* like to get around apparently."

"Onto other matters," the nightmaren continued "I *do* have a job for you all, just don't screw it up this time."

"So, did you talk to NiGHTS last night?" Will whispered to Juliet as she took her seat in the study hall, she wasn't all that surprised to see him become a regular there.

"Yeah, about that…" Juliet looked down, not really sure how to explain what NiGHTS had said last night, "he said he doesn't know you two…" she sighed.

Will frowned, then looked back down at his work, "We told you not to worry about it. Ah, nevermind. Did he know anything about what happened, though?"

"I think he also knows something about that… Nightmare. I wasn't able to get anything else out of him, though." she shrugged.

"Yeah, he was never one to 'spill the beans' I guess. He kept a lot of secrets from Helen and I, big ones too."

"How did you and Helen meet NiGHTS anyway…?" Juliet asked, she's been wondering about it nonstop since their discussion at the cafe.

"Well…" Will started, "we all met in Nightopia I guess, like you.

NiGHTS needed help, and he found us. That's basically the story, it's not that exciting, really."

"I doubt *that* ," Juliet objected. "But you all met each other in Nightopia? Wow... " she gasped under her breath, "that's pretty cool that you two are friends in real life as well, then. How often do you two see each other?"

Will froze, "oh well, about that. Helen and I never actually… well… it's complicated."

"Oh.. were you two just too busy?"

"Well… no, not really. We forgot… about everything I guess. I mean Nightopia and all. NiGHTS, Owl, even meeting each other. I don't know," Will shrugged, "I haven't been there at all since I was 13, I don't know what happened that made us forget... I mean… I've seen Helen around uh… around town but.. I guess tonight everything suddenly came back. I still don't remember what happened in Nightopia, though. I only remember… nevermind, don't worry about it." He was turning red, clearly not wanting to talk about it any longer.

"I wonder if that has anything to do with the way NiGHTS was acting…" Juliet was interrupted by the sound of the bell to dismiss class. Oh great, she thought, I got no work done.

"Wanna meet up in the library after school again?" Will asked.

"Sure, I've got nothing else to do I guess," Juliet laughed, and headed out of the classroom to her next class to see Alaia in math

Juliet's math teacher was probably her favorite. They all called her Miss D, since her full name was a little weird for most people. Miss D is who really helped Juliet understand math; she made it quite easy to understand as long as you stayed awake during class. It was the one class Juliet never really daydreamed in, she wanted to be as attentive as possible.

Juliet sat down next to Alaia, who was staring at her with tired eyes. She felt almost uncomfortable talking to her right now, but knew she

had to. Alaia was her friend, after all. Luckily for Juliet, Alaia spoke first.

"I got your text last night about needing to leave the party, was everything okay?

"Oh… uh, yeah," Juliet felt bad lying to her. She had sent a text to Alaia at the Cafe last night saying she had felt sick. Luckily, Alaia knows Juliet's history with crowds and loud music, it wasn't too far fetched of a lie. "Look, wanna meet up at FullMoon Cafe after school? We can catch up a bit and actually have a proper date for once without me somehow ruining it…" she froze.

"...Date?" Alaia smiled.

"Well, yeah you know. Like just us?" Juliet tried covering up her slipup.

Alaia just laughed, "Then it's a date! And….we don't actually have to talk about what happened… I mean I'd love to be caught up and all but I don't want to force anything out of you.."

"Yeah…" Juliet said quietly as Miss D entered the room. She knew this all meant a lot to Alaia, but she didn't want her to get involved. If Juliet had known things were going to be happening in the Waking World too she never would have brought it up with Alaia in the first place. If anything happened to Alaia, or any of her friends, because of her she didn't know what she would do.

"I hope you all had fun last night, but I also hope you remembered you all did have school today," Miss D announced loudly as several kids were dozing off, or even already asleep.

Juliet walked by the cafe to meet Alaia, figuring they'd meet outside and head in together. She stood there awkwardly for about 5 minutes until she heard banging on the window, and Alaia desperately gestured to her to come inside.

"Oh, you're already here," Juliet laughed, feeling even more awkward than before.

"Well, I was going to wait outside for you but one of the workers told

me to come inside since it's cold out. She was very nice, interesting hair too."

Juliet shrugged, "It's not *that* cold out. I guess it's nice to see someone be that concerned, though." *Hard to come across lately…*

Their thoughts were interrupted by one of the waitresses placing a cup of hot chocolate in front of Alaia.

"Thank you! Sorry, I went ahead and got something to pass time since I didn't know how long you were going to take. Hope you're not offended!"

"Not at all," Juliet smiled, but she was a bit embarrassed.

"How about I get you something too?" The lady smiled at Juliet. Juliet stumbled on her words, she hadn't thought about what she was going to get, just that she was going to see Alaia.

"I'll just have the same thing…."

The waitress nodded and left the two alone again.

"She was the one who summoned me inside. She's nice... almost *too* nice if you ask me." Alaia mentioned, taking a sip of her drink.

Juliet nodded as the waitress returned with another cup of hot chocolate and placed it in front of Juliet. "Anything else for you two?"

"Not right now, thank you." Alaia smiled.

Juliet's eyes focused on a poster hanging up on the cafe's wall. It said 'Dreamer's Night' in big text, and a picture of a lady she recognized as the person serving them.

"Is that you?" She pointed at the poster and looked up at the waitress, who smiled and chuckled to herself.

"Oh that? That's kind of old... God knows why it's still up there. We haven't done spring cleaning in a while."

"So you're a singer?" Juliet questioned.

"Used to be. I mean, I guess I'm still studying music. I used to sing here on Friday nights for a little extra cash. I stopped though, since I didn't really need to."

"I think that sounds lovely," Alaia smiled.

"Just because you don't mean to doesn't mean you shouldn't," Juliet chimed in, "I'm sure you have a lovely voice."

The waitress chuckled, "I like you… you remind me of a friend I once knew. What's your name?"

"Uh... it's Juliet…"

"I do miss doing it. I also attracted a lot of customers," she blushed, "maybe I'll talk to my manager. I know she misses it too. Thanks. You should stop by soon and I'll let you know what she says."

Juliet turned red, "Of course I will, I wouldn't miss getting to see that!"

"Then it's settled," she winked, "I'm Claris by the way. I'll see you around, then."

Chapter 4

When Jolten took off, it was a feeling Claris had never felt before with NiGHTS. They sped through different lights and colors, some colors never before imagined by humans. Everything passed by so fast, and Claris felt like had weighed nothing while speeding through the endless dream world. It felt weird to not be dualized.

There was a bright light, and Jolten had abruptly ceased flying, causing the dreamer to fly off landing in a big pile of rubble.

Claris picked herself up and looked down at her scraped and bleeding knees. She grunted a bit while trying to walk, and tried to refocus herself so she could follow Jolten. Although her physical body couldn't be harmed while dreaming, her dream body was still susceptible to injury.

The location Jolten had taken her to was a dark and cloudy world, almost as if Jolten did take her straight into Nightmare, but it was too calm of an atmosphere to be as such. On the ground was a cobble walkway, and several fountains and shrubs lined the perimeter. There appeared to be the remains of what used to be buildings and castles scattered around blocking pathways leading to large doors that have been broken down. A long bridge stretched into the distance and was lost in the heavy fog surrounding the world, and below were waters so dark and heavy it looked like ink.

There were so many other buildings! It felt more like a town rather than a dream world. Claris could almost picture visitors bussing around like her own town. Claris began to head towards the most eye-catching aspect of the plaza, the castle. Claris had never heard mention of any royalty in the dream world, unless Wizeman and 1st level nightmaren count. That would make NiGHTS a prince of sorts.

"What is this place…" Claris said in awe, looking around for Jolten who had wandered quite a distance from the dreamer.

"They called it the Dream Plaza, it was abandoned very recently, actually. Well, compared to how old the Night Dimension itself is."

He yelled back.

"This is the Dream Plaza? Why was it abandoned..? It looks like it could still be functional."

"Probably had something to do with Master Wizeman's growing power. Don't know the facts, but I like to scavenge around here. Never know what the old visitors could've left behind," Jolten smirked.

"Master Wizeman…?" Claris looked up at the Nightmaren, "you're loyal to him still. You're evil, I knew it!"

"Calm down, princess. I'm not here to steal your ideya anything like the big bad 2nd levels. Just thought maybe you'd like to know it's here. Plus… I need help with something," Jolten finally admitted.

Claris ignored Jolten's confession and was already wandering off to explore, hoping not to be around the nightmaren alone any longer, Jolten furiously flew after her. She pointed to the bridge off the edge. It was kind of creepy looking surrounded by all the fog. "Where does that bridge lead to?"

Jolten took no time in responding, "Nightmare." Before Claris had time to enter panic-mode, Jolten continued to explain further, "Yes, that bridge leads to Nightmare. On the other side is a plaza not too different from this one, but filled with nightmares instead of dreams."

"What visitor would choose to visit Nightmare, though?"

Jolten shrugged, "I think it was more for nightmarens than visitors. There are some weird visitors out there, though."

"I'm guessing that place was abandoned too, then," Claris looked across the bridge with a grim expression.

"It was abandoned long before this place even was. You don't gotta worry about that boring old place, though. I've got stuff to do." Jolten gave a smirk, and quickly fled, leaving Claris a bit confused. She began to give chase to the ecstatic nightmaren, but lost their track. She still had questions, but decided to do some investigating herself. She felt more comfortable not being with Jolten, but he ***was*** *her ride*

back to Nightopia.

Although Jolten said not to mind the Nightmare Plaza, something about it intrigued her. If it was abandoned, what would the harm be in exploring it? She glanced around to make sure Jolten was not in sight before quickly pacing towards the bridge and crossing it.

The bridge was certainly long, and it was strange to think why a place connected to Nightopia and a place connected to Nightmare would be connected to begin with. Maybe there would be something that explained it further on the other side.

After a while of walking, the Nightmare Plaza finally came into her view. It didn't look too different from the previous location, but it certainly had a creepier atmosphere to it. It appeared to be wildly overgrown with dangerous looking wildlife, and a few 3rd Level Nightmaren did catch her eye briefly. If she wanted to explore, she would have to be cautious.

A little down the cobblestone path she came across a church-like building. There wasn't anything too exciting about it, and she wondered what use a cathedral would have in a dream world. For some reason though, she felt particularly odd standing outside of it, odd in a way she couldn't explain. Slowly she climbed the steps and opened the large front doors.

There was no doubt in her mind now that this building mimicked a church of some sort. This whole place really was like a small village. There were several stained glass windows along the interior that didn't stand out that well outside. The moonlight shining through them from inside made them much more prominent. It was hard to tell what story they told exactly, but one she could see was Wizeman himself. Something about the imagery felt odd though, as if something else existed before them.

The odd feeling continuously swept over Claris again as she brushed past the rows of seats and followed the energy she felt down a hallway. It wasn't a very long hallway, it was a very small building, and it appeared to lead to a dead end.

She paused suddenly as her hands began to emit a bright crimson

glow. This hasn't happened for some time, she thought. When she looked back at the supposed dead end, it was gone. The hallway seemed to go on for miles from where she stood, and the walls seemed different too. Looking back, Claris noticed where she came from originally was also gone. The long extending hallway was all there was.

Claris began to walk forward down the hall. It really didn't seem to end. The only thing within sight were the small torches slightly illuminating the hall, barely enough to see.

Claris walked step after step for a while, until one step she felt her foot sink down on a tile. She heard a loud rumbling, and when she turned around she saw a large boulder rolling in her direction. A trap? Claris began running, sprinting further down the hall. There had to be an end at some point.

While in her desperate sprint, she caught a glimpse of a torch that was glowing brighter than the other ones she'd passed. If there are traps, there are puzzles. She quickly jumped up and swiped the torch off the wall. All the other torches within sight blew out, but the section of the wall in front of her began to crumble. There was another hall beyond it, much better lit than the first. Claris quickly hopped inside and watched as the boulder rolled past her, sighing in relief.

She started heading down the new hallway, and it seemed to branch off into other halls, which branched off into more other halls… Now she was stuck in a maze. Claris wandered aimlessly around the spiraling halls for quite some time, having no real plan in mind or any idea if there was an end to this at all. She started getting tired and drained from all this walking, and wasn't even paying attention when she bumped into a large column.

She jolted up and saw the new room in front of her. It was a circular room, with a very eerie atmosphere. Large columns aligned the outskirts of the room, and a small pedestal stood in the center of a shallow pool of dark water.

Like a magnet, Claris was drawn towards the pedestal in the center, walking across a raised platform towards it. On the pedestal rested a

small orb reflecting the red from the torches around the room.

Claris began to feel that same anger, it was stronger the closer she got to the orb. The odd feeling the room gave off could be felt all the way from outside wherever this place was, it was powerful.

She looked down at the orb with a grim expression, and took it into her own hands. It was warm as she took hold of it- like it was living. It felt safe now.

"Was all that anger… you?" Claris said out loud, directed towards the baseball sized orb in her hands. She could've sworn she heard a voice reply 'Yes' in return, but she couldn't be sure of it.

Getting creeped out by the room, Claris wanted to leave. She wasn't really sure how to get back, and she also didn't want to leave the orb behind.

'Why… why aren't I…' the voice spoke up again, but was caught off by a bright light swallowing the room. When Claris opened her eyes she was back inside the church.

"I'm back…?" She glanced down, seeing the orb was still in her hands. That definitely just happened, it was no fever dream, which means Jolten was still around here.

"Hey visitor!" She heard Jolten call from behind, "I was wondering where you were. Why'd you come all the way over here, I told you not to!"

Claris saw Jolten holding onto a small red gem-like fragment. "What's that?"

Jolten quickly tucked it away inside his jacket, "you don't have to worry about that. I could ask you the same thing," he gestured towards the orb in her hands.

"Oh… I don't really know. I'm going to talk to NiGHTS about it…"

"NiGHTS? I'm right here. Talk to me about it!"

"Oh I...don't know," Claris frantically passed Jolten back into the

cathedral. "Look, I appreciate you showing me around and all but… you're still a nightmaren and…"

"So?" He spat. "NiGHTS is a nightmaren too! I thought we were friends now!"

Claris ran out of the cathedral back outside, clutching the orb close to her chest. It didn't occur to her that she had no idea how to return back to her Nightopia.

Jolten flew outside behind her, "Where are you goin' kid?" his friendly demeanor turned into a growl, "this is my territory you know- you're stealing from me!"

"It's nothing I want a nightmaren getting close to!" She shouted, backing away from the electric being.

*"Yet you still want to take it to **NiGHTS** ?" they spat, "I've got a newsflash for you kid in case you forgot-!"*

Jolten was cut off as something rammed into their side. It was NiGHTS.

"NiGHTS!" Claris smiled, glad to see her friend here. But something was off… NiGHTS looks different. Not different appearance wise, but he didn't look as friendly as he usually was. Even Jolten had given off a similar energy just now. Claris felt the orb become warmer.

*"You…." Jolten muttered, picking themself back up on their feet. "Always **ruining** everything…" They started limply flying in the direction of the duo, but NiGHTS was quicker. He knocked Jolten back onto the ground, Jolten letting out a cry of frustration as they plunged into the ground.*

*"Claris! What are you doing here? With that **thing** , nonetheless?" NiGHTS demanded, gritting their teeth. "Or should I rephrase it," NiGHTS was hovering over Jolten's body, and bent over to get close to their face, "what is this **thing** doing here with Claris?"*

"I wanted to know more about the Dream Plaza that you mentioned! And this is it NiGHTS! It's real!" she tried to lighten the mood, but

NiGHTS did not look happy in the slightest.

"I was just helping her out- in exchange for her help that is." Jolten managed to spit out.

"Help?" NiGHTS looked at Claris, "what did you do?"

"She didn't do anything herself," Jolten groaned in annoyance, "it was her ideya I needed."

"You stole her ideya?" NiGHTS hissed in Jolten's face. Jolten had never seen NiGHTS act like this before… Was this his nightmaren side?

"No! You think Master Wizeman trusts me with stealing ideya? I just needed her to be here to find something, that's it. No need to get so protective over your stupid visitor friends," Jolten said through gritted teeth, rolling their eyes.

NiGHTS finally got off of them, and flew back over to where Claris had been sitting. He held out his hand to Claris, and she reached for it with the hand holding the orb, which NiGHTS then took into his own. "Where did you find this…?" he muttered.

"It's a long story... I got curious and when I touched it, it seemed to react to me. Do… know what it is…?"

Not to Claris' surprise, NiGHTS shook his head.

"I barely even know where we are. I sensed nightmaren in Spring Valley and saw you flying away with Jolten. I… I followed you…" NiGHTS' tone hinted at regret in his actions, but in the end Claris was glad he did.

"I told you before, we're in the Dream Plaza. Well… I guess this would be the Nightmare Plaza." The twos eyes locked, and Claris noticed NiGHTS' eyes glisten with slight happiness as the anger washed away. The orb calmed down.

NiGHTS helped Claris off the ground and the two dualized. It felt good to actually be dualized with him again, but it felt even better knowing they could leave now.

"So what… you're just gonna fly off and pretend like nothing happened as usual, huh?" Jolten called as NiGHTS and Claris began to head out. NiGHTS gave an expressionless glance back at Jolten. "You're no different than me you know…" They muttered, "we're both mistakes! You failed as a nightmaren too, you're no more of a first level than I am!"

"What was all that about, NiGHTS?" Claris asked her friend quietly, but at this point she wasn't expecting much of an answer.

"It was nothing. Just another nightmaren trying to get to your ideya as all." NiGHTS shrugged and glanced around, "If that runt is out and about again, there could be more of them. Maybe it's best you wake up now and I'll make sure it's safe for tomorrow."

"Uh, NiGHTS… one more thing."

"What is it?"

"What happened back there? You seemed… different. Do you have a history with Jolten?" Claris finally inquired.

"I don't know what came over me back there, to be honest. I mean I don't have a big history with Jolten but maybe seeing him made me lash out." NiGHTS crossed his arms and began to play back what happened at the Dream Plaza.

"So who is Jolten…?"

"Jolten was… how do I put this…" NiGHTS looked away and tapped his face thinking of the words to use, "a failed version of me."

Claris cocked her head, "Jolten is supposed to be you? They don't really seem like it…"

NiGHTS laughed, "Of course! There can only be one me, I'm the best!"

Claris chuckled back, but quickly tried to settle the jester down as he began flying around confidently, "getting...back on the subject. How is Jolten a failed...you? Do you mean he's like Jackle?"

"In a way, yes!" NiGHTS grinned. "Before Reala and I were created, Wizeman of course had to experiment in order to create the perfect nightmaren, and that's what Jolten is."

"Jolten's an experiment? They didn't seem, uh, failed to me…" Claris scratched her head. Now that she thought about it, Jolten didn't dualize with her, and refused to really say why. Is that why they're a failure?

"I mean, I wasn't around when Jolten was scrapped, so I don't know the details. Most failures were destroyed after creation, but for some reason Wizeman let that nuisance hang around, and a few others."

"The way you talk about them makes it seem like you had some kind of fight with them before… what happened between you two?"

NiGHTS shrugged, "I talk about all nightmaren like that, Jolten's no different."

He flew down closer to Claris, crossing his legs and taking a seat right next to her, "Feels like we do this every night, don't we? That Dream Plaza, though…!"

"I knew it probably existed!" Claris smiled, "I mean, anything's possible in a world of dreams I guess."

"Yeah…" NiGHTS smiled back, his eyes glistening as he stared around Claris' nightopia. "Something like that would be truly amazing, wouldn't it? A place to welcome visitors… fly around…" He trailed off as if he was lost in a daydream.

Claris looked over at an oncoming alarm egg that was dancing towards her. NiGHTS seemed too lost in thought, and she didn't want to bother him. Silently, she sat patiently until the alarm egg came to wake her up, and she was almost glad about it. This was the longest dream of her life.

"Hoo, you don't look too good tonight. What's keeping you down?" Owl cooed, brushing his wings against NiGHTS face.

"What's *not* keeping me down? Look at this place, Owl… it's all my fault."

"How exactly is it your fault? The Dream Gate was not meant to stand forever, you knew that, after all, you did make it."

"I didn't make it," NiGHTS buried his face in his sleeves, "I *stole* it. It should've lasted longer… I didn't think about what would happen after defeating Wizeman, and now it's gone. So will the rest of Nightopia."

"Well Nightopia lasted just fine without the Dream Gate. Besides we still have the visitor t-"

"No," NiGHTS cut Owl off, "now things are going to mess up even more. There's no hope, don't you see, Owl? Everything is my fault."

"Now, now! I do hate seeing you like this! Perhaps give the visitor another chance. Give the other visitors a chance, too. I know what had happened in the past was traumatic for you but, they may be the only help we can get at the moment. I believe being able to reunite with them may help ease some of your struggles these past few years."

"What, no hoo?" NiGHTS sighed.

"Hoo." Owl replied in a sarcastic tone.

NiGHTS groaned, and sat up, levitating off the ground a bit, "Alright, I'll think about it and talk to Juliet. There's something else she mentioned to me that's been bothering me… Owl do you know of any Visitors besides Juliet here currently?"

Owl shook his head, feathers falling to the ground. "Afraid she has been the only one in years."

NiGHTS pouted, "That doesn't make sense… because Juliet told me she met more of them in the Waking World. Apparently they follow some new leader of Nightmare… but I don't know who that could be. Reala wouldn't be recruiting Visitors, that's for sure."

"I see… so what do you plan on doing about it?"

"I'm going to do some investigating, mostly around the rest of the Dream Plaza… I think there might be something there in that old Library."

Owl nodded, "I will keep my eye out for anything that could help, and perhaps try to talk to the Visitor more to see what more she knows about this suspicious group."

NiGHTS and Owl nodded on it, and the two decided to sit together in silence the rest of the night, admiring the empty surroundings.

"Wonder where NiGHTS is…" Juliet muttered to herself as she walked around her Nightopia. There were significantly less nightopians playing in the flowers tonight than usual, but Juliet didn't think much of it. There was probably a new more exciting Nightopia that opened up or something, way better than hers at least.

She peered off into the distance and saw a figure in the grass. It was sitting, and looking off towards the big pool of water in the heart of the dream, paying no attention to Juliet's presence.

"Hello!" She called, walked over to the other person, who she assumed to be another visitor.

As she got closer, the figure turned around and grinned at her, and Juliet recognized it to be the black haired boy from the party, this time without the dumb lion party mask. Her heart sank.

"I was wondering when you were gonna get here. I was getting kinda bored." He sneered. "Anyway," he continued standing up, "let's get down to business."

Juliet instinctively jumped back, "Don't you *dare* do anything mean!"

"Mean? Even your vocabulary is weak. Anyway, I'm *just* here to *talk* , stupid."

"To… talk?"

The boy got closer to her, "Look, you're a cute girl. A lot cuter than the ones *I'm* forced to be with every miserable night. So… how about you give this whole 'hope hero' thing up so nothing happens to

you? If you aren't going to join us, that is. That way you get to stay in your own world, and Nightmayr gets to take over this place. How does that sound to you?"

"I don't care what you and this Nightmayr guy you say want but if NiGHTS and Owl will get hurt from it then it's not happening!"

He frowned, "Here I thought you would be nice and cooperate. That was a joke by the way. I'm *trying* to *help* you here. You'll only be in the way, and you'll only get hurt." He moved in even closer to Juliet now. "I'd just hate to see something bad happen to you. You're nice, y'know? Nightmayr doesn't really like to hurt visitors, but I would be sad for you if something were to happen to your nightmaren friend."

"...Nightmaren friend?" Juliet looked at the boy in confusion, "who are you anyway? Why do you even *want* to do this? Why don't you want to help people and do *good* things? By the sound of it, Nightmayr isn't really a great guy even if he doesn't want to hurt visitors like you say he doesn't!"

The boy's attitude immediately transformed, and now he was just mad, "I had my fun here. Nightmayr showed me that there's a lot more than just this small lot. And *a lot* of power too. Do you know the control we could have by giving every person nightmares the rest of their life? *I'm* going to be part of something a lot greater, in a world that never cared about me. I'll show the world that I *can* mean something. You don't get what you want in life by just hoping."

Juliet shook her head.

"Doesn't matter anymore. If you wanna stay and help your flying imaginary friend go ahead, but don't say I didn't warn you." He looked down in frustration, "It's Marcus by the way. Don't like… forget it." Marcus turned around and began walking away, Juliet was unsure of where he was off to but decided chasing him was useless. It was best to stay here and wait for NiGHTS.

The sound of a gentle flute caught her attention, and she knew from that sound that NiGHTS had to be nearby.

"Oh, NiGHTS there you are!" Juliet ran up to her friend, who was

playing some music to calm some Nightopians down. "I was looking for you!"

"You were?" NiGHTS chuckled, "Oh right, of course you were."

"So did you figure anything out? About tht Nightmare?"

"No…" NiGHTS sighed, putting down his hands and sending the Nightopian off, "I checked some old places where I thought I'd find something but I came out empty handed. What about you?"

"Well there's not much I can do investigation wise when I'm awake but I did run into one of those Nightmare kids just now," Juliet tapped her chin, maybe it wasn't a good idea to tell NiGHTS about their encounter.

"You did, what happened? Are you alright?" NiGHTS got close to Juliet in concern.

Juliet flinched and stepped back, "Yeah! He didn't hurt me but he threatened me to step off. He actually said *you* would be the one getting hurt…"

"I see. This Nightmaren leader... whoever this guy is. I think we need to be prepared for anything, Juliet." NiGHTS confirmed confidently.

The two looked over to see a few nightopians humbly floating about the lavender. NiGHTS chuckled as one inhaled the scent of it and let out a loud sneeze, blowing another nightopian over.

The nightopian huffed, and angrily flew over to the other, now dizzy from the pollen. The first nightopia noticed the anger of its friend and quickly ducked down into the tall lavender flowers to hide from it.

"Hey! Take a look at them!" NiGHTS pointed to the commotion. Just then a few 3rd level nightmaren began to parade over the hills towards the group of nightopian.

"Aren't those nightmaren?" Juliet frantically spotted, and NiGHTS leapt up into the air in action. "I was wondering when they were going to send you lot again. Bad for you, I'm in a fighting mood right

now!"

"Fight? NiGHTS I can't fight!" Juliet yelled.

"Not like *that* you can't." NiGHTS smiled down at the girl, "Come on, remember what I mentioned before, well, quickly mentioned before? Dualize with me!" NiGHTS held his hand out to the dreamer, motioning for her to touch it.

Juliet stared up at NiGHTS' eager expression, and she could tell it's been a long time since he's been able to do this. She decided to satisfy NiGHTS' wishes, and took his hand. There was a bright light, that blinded Juliet for a split second before she found herself looking down at the field from NiGHTS' point of view.

"Incredible.." Juliet gasped.

"Check it out!" NiGHTS motioned towards the nightopian, "the others are following what sneezy did!" As the parade of shleep began flying over to the flowers the nightopians all ducked under, hiding their purple bodys among the purple of the lavender.

"They're hiding from the nightmaren!" Juliet remarked.

"Exactly. That gives us enough time to save them. My paraloop can teleport them someplace safer in the Nightopia, just follow my lead! Let's get to the nightopians before those nightmaren can!"

Juliet nodded, still feeling a bit out of it from dualizing. Still, the feeling of flying managed to draw her mind elsewhere. It was easy to forget they were fighting off nightmaren what with all the fun she was having.

Paralooping was also a strange feeling to her. The exploding feeling behind her felt almost unsafe, she could feel the wind it created blow against her back for a second before dispersing. After a long game of what felt like hide and seek with the nightopians, and chasing off the rest of the nightmaren, the two were finally able to relax. Unfortunately, their relaxation was interrupted by a familiar loud rumbling noise from over the plains.

"What was that?" Juliet yelped, looking over into the direction of the

noise. A large shadow loomed over the peaceful plains and many nightopians scattered away, "Is it more nightmaren?"

"I don't think those shleep were the only thing this 'Nightmayr' planned to send out tonight. It's coming from the lake- let's go!"

NiGHTS and Juliet stopped right at the end of the lake, and Juliet knew by NiGHTS' determined expression that something was underneath the water.

Before she knew it, Juliet found herself in a different location. The lake from her dream was now a muddy, disgusting swamp in the center of a creepy looking forest. It gave her the creeps.

A large crocodile nightmaren crawled out from the muddy water. It was greyish blue in color, and had large hungry slit eyes that stared right at Juliet.

"It is another nightmaren!" She yelped.

NiGHTS grinned with determination, and flung himself towards the 2nd level nightmaren. "Alright, big guy. Ready to take a dive?" The duo rammed into the crocodile to get his attention, who in return spun around to find them, creating a large splash with his tail.

"We need to get him on his side," NiGHTS explained, "Crocile's weakness is his stomach."

"Crocile…? NiGHTS do you know him?" Juliet's question was unheard by NiGHTS, and he already flew ahead below the large nightmaren trying to use his own strength to flip him over.

"This is no good, he's too big to flip over. Got any ideas, Juliet?"

"Actually… yes I do!"

"The fields all yours then!" In an instant, Juliet had full control over her and NiGHTS' actions. It took a while to focus herself into the right flying position, but she quickly got the hang of it. Juliet began to fly in circles around Crocile, which caused him to spin around in frustration trying to catch them. Crocile finally showed signs of dizziness from spinning for so long, and Juliet decided it was time to

go in for the kill. She flew above Crocile, and he fell over from loss of balance.

"All yours, NiGHTS." She said proudly.

"Nope, all *ours.* " NiGHTS smiled. The two flew down to the nightmarens stomach and gave it a big paraloop. Crocile roared in defeat, and disappeared into the swamp. A bright light emitted from the bubbles he left, and NiGHTS and Juliet knew their work was done.

The nightmarish world transformed back into Juliet's familiar Nightopia, and at the foot of the lake was a small white light.

"Your Ideya of purity was within the heart of the nightopia, go on!" NiGHTS pushed the dreamer forward. Juliet stared at the ideya for a while, and cupped it in her hands.

So this is ideya… *my* ideya. *My purity…*

"So, do you feel any different?" NiGHTS asked eagerly. He and Juliet had defeated their first nightmaren together, and Juliet has reclaimed her lost Ideya of purity, which she didn't even know she had lost.

She had so many questions now about NiGHTS and the dream world itself. What just happened? She was NiGHTS… but at the same time she was flying! She was flying… how could she do that? "I mean… I don't really have words... " she gasped.

"But now that you've recovered your ideya of purity you should feel even stronger now! We need to find your other ideya too before those no good nightmarens get to them."

Juliet looked around her nightopia, nothing seemed different. Did that ideya even do anything? She didn't feel different, but I guess she couldn't have missed what she didn't know she lost, or even had to begin with. How were they supposed to find the other ideya she was missing?

"I think it's time you got out of this place and stretched your legs a bit elsewhere." NiGHTS recommended. "I was a bit apprehensive to

take you to where me and Owl have been since the Dream Gate collapsed, but I guess since you're getting stronger it could be of great help to have you around there!"

"Oh? Is it another Nightopia?" Juliet asked excitedly.

"Not quite, it's very similar to the Dream Gate but… not as calming in my opinion," the nightmaren crossed his arms and pouted. He flew down to Juliet's height and extended his arm, "shall we go?"

"I dunno, I've been asleep for a while… even though I don't have school today I should probably wake up. I don't want to waste the entire day napping."

"What do you mean 'waste'?" NiGHTS joked, looking rather offended. Juliet chuckled, but bid her friend farewell as they undualized. She probably could have stayed longer, but she remembered her promise to meet up with Helen and Will again to discuss things. Who knows how long she's already been sleeping in?

Chapter 5

Memory Forest was always Helen's favorite Nightopia to be in. She wasn't sure if it was the comforting feeling of nostalgia the dense forest gave, or the lively Nightopians always playing their music in the mossy concert hall, but whatever it was she loved being there.

NiGHTS was gone; he said he had to do some nightopian census every century or something, but Helen didn't really believe him. No matter, it gave her some time to be alone and reflect on certain things. The Nightopians were singing a slow paced tune, which made Helen a little drowsy, despite already being asleep. Everything was peaceful, and stayed peaceful.

Her attention was caught by a figure running quickly behind the concert hall. Curious, Helen stood up and made her way over to behind the stage, figuring it was probably just another 3rd level to get rid of. Luckily, she was capable of that.

To her surprise, behind the stage another visitor was frantically walking around almost appearing to look lost.

"Excuse me?" Helen spoke, the other visitor turned around and smiled at her.

"Oh, hello! I wasn't sure if I'd see another visitor here!" The other visitor responded.

"I could… say the same thing in all honesty," Helen replied sheepishly, "you look lost… how did you get here exactly?"

The other visitor seemed to freeze up slightly at that question as if they weren't prepared for an answer, "I'm not sure," they quickly said, brushing their fingers through their silver hair.

"Well, I guess that doesn't really matter… things can be quite weird here. Why don't I help you back to the Dream Gate? It's not the first time I've had to do it before."

The silver haired visitor smiled, "You're a very nice girl, thank you."

Helen led the other visitor through the dark and thick woods. The visitor seemed almost mesmerized by the world. Music was pouring out of almost every corner of the Nightopia, and the constant changing of daytime to nighttime was an interesting effect as well. Luckily, not too many nightmaren were out and about.

As they got to the large merry-go-round, the door to the Dream Gate was in view. The visitor smiled as they watched the merry-go-round as it spun around, brightening up the dark forest with its warm and flashy colors.

Helen lead them over to the door, "Nightopia can be a confusing place, but try not to get lost again," she chuckled and turned around, but the visitor was now gone.

Behind Helen was a large black-hole like portal. It looked almost galaxy like- shining blue purple and silver around it. She didn't plan on getting too close, and was about to turn around to find the visitor until she felt a kick on her back, sending her right through the portal.

Helen opened her eyes to see she was no longer in the comfort of Memory Forest, and the other visitor was nowhere in sight. Instead she found herself in an almost-familiar setting. It looks just like the Dream Gate… but much larger. One thing definitely stood out to her.

A… castle? Helen thought. Is there some kind of royalty here?

Helen's hands suddenly began to emit a bright ruby glow, but it felt different… like it was being forced out of her. Like someone was summoning it. She looked back up at the castle, and her ideya began glowing brighter. Something was definitely calling her. She decided to follow her instincts and head inside the castle, but she was a little nervous to do so.

Maybe I should wait for NiGHTS… this doesn't seem like something I should be doing… Helen's thoughts were cut off by another sensation that she couldn't describe, but it was almost as if whatever was calling her was saying "No, No!"

The corridors were long, and the castle was obviously abandoned. It made Helen uncomfortable at the thought of being alone in this huge place, but the feelings she was getting made her remember that it might not be the case.

Whatever was summoning her led her to a small spiral staircase, almost hidden and easy to miss behind a wall. Helen didn't want to go up them, the stairs looked old, and she was afraid they would break from right under her, but she obeyed and began climbing them very slowly. At the top was another long hallway that led to two large black wooden doors that practically looked new. Now more curiously instead of instinctively the dreamer approached them, and she could hear a voice in her head saying "Yes, yes!"

Helen pushed open the doors, which were a lot heavier than they looked. She looked in cautiously, and to her surprise she sees Will standing inside too.

"What- Will? Were… you the one calling me?"

*"What? No! Were **you** calling **me** ?" He asked defensively.*

"No way! I mean…" Helen glanced around the room again. It was almost empty, apart from a small chest inside a glass casing. It looked pretty important to her. "What's that?"

Will shrugged, "Like I know. Should we open it?"

"I don't know… I'm kind of scared to. Where even is this place?"

"I'll open it then," Will ignored Helen's inquiry and already began to walk towards the chest, picking the glass casing off.

Helen stepped back and began to examine the room a bit more. There weren't any windows, and the shaping of the walls showed it had to be a tower of some sort. But what was calling her here? Did NiGHTS know about this place? Where… was NiGHTS?

"It's open," Will called over to Helen as she was lost in her exploring of the tower.

"So, what's inside?" She asked eagerly, jumping to his side now.

"'Dunno. Some kind of ball."

"It looks like an orb!" Helen said excitedly, "I think we just found treasure! We should tell NiGHTS!"

***No** a voice said, almost demandingly. Helen held her head, and looked to see Will was doing the same thing. Was that… the orb?*

"Is it… talking?" Helen groaned.

I am a friend, and I need your help. I'm… imprisoned in this orb, I have been for centuries. I almost succeeded in escaping many years ago it feels like, but I've only become more conscious of my… situation since then. Do not tell the Nightmaren.

"Why can't we tell NiGHTS?" Will wondered out loud.

He is the one who locked me away.

*"Ohhh **no** ," Will backed away, "if NiGHTS locked this thing away it's probably something bad- let's close it back up and leave!"*

He locked me away as a promise to another friend I once knew, one who I was hoping to see again. I bare no ill-will. I simply wish to get out of here. Where I'll go from there… I'm unsure.

Helen exchanged a nervous glance with Will, but she knew they were both thinking the same thing. "What can we do to help you?"

You can- drat! Stop talking, stop talking!

Helen was confused. Stop talking? What did it mean?

"What are you two doing here?" NiGHTS shouted angrily, standing in the doorway.

"NiGHTS? I thought you were-"

"Be quiet, Helen! What are you two doing here?" NiGHTS was gritting his teeth, and in the 2 years Helen had known NiGHTS she had never seen him so angry before. What was up with him?

"I don't know!" Helen confessed truthfully, "I was helping a visitor and there was a weird portal and then the next thing I know I'm in this weird Dream Gate place and this voice is talking to me and now I'm here!"

*NiGHTS pointed to the orb, which was still sitting silently inside of the chest. He looked almost scared, "Why is **that** opened?"*

"Calm down, NiGHTS!" Will pleaded, "We didn't touch anything, see? What I want to know is why this orb is here in the first place. Why would you lock it up? Someone is trapped in it!"

*This caught NiGHTS off guard, "...Inside it? If something was trapped in there I would've been able to tell. Besides, what's in it? A visitor? A Nightmaren? An **octopaw** ?" Now his anger was turning into sass. "It doesn't matter. I'm taking it and finding a better place to keep it. You two have no idea what it is, and you shouldn't be up here anyway."*

*NiGHTS started flying towards the box, but Helen ran to it faster and grabbed the orb. The orb started glowing in her hand again, and it felt… warm, as if it was alive. "I don't think you know what it is either, NiGHTS. We're your friends, can't you trust us? **We** trust **you** !"*

"Helen," NiGHTS moved in closer to the dreamer, "give it to me."

NiGHTS reached out his hand to take it from her, but Helen ducked and threw it to Will, "Will, catch!"

Will caught it, and NiGHTS turned around to fly towards him. He panicked, and chucked it back to Helen. "Nightmaren in the middle!" He shouted playfully.

*The two played keep away with NiGHTS for a few throws more, and NiGHTS was starting to really lose himself, and he could feel it. Something was wrong with him " **You two** …!" He growled, he could feel something changing inside of him. What's happening? Don't lose it. He thought to himself. Don't do something you'll regret.*

NiGHTS was about to catch the orb in the air, but his thoughts distracted him and he hesitated for a brief moment. Will let the orb

drop to the ground before kicking it over to Helen. NiGHTS went back into nightmaren mode and swooped after the orb, knocking into the girl. The two fell over, both missing the orb, and it hit the ground hard.

It shattered into pieces.

All three of them stared in awe as a dark mist emitted from the shattered cell. Helen could hear someone laughing in her head.

NiGHTS looked down at the broken orb with an empty expression. Why did NiGHTS care so much about this orb?

"This was… her's… maybe she..." NiGHTS bent over and picked up the shattered pieces in his hand, "I'm sorry Claris…"

"Sorry, NiGHTS… it was an accident." Will said regretfully, "Maybe there's a way to fix it?"

"Be quiet!" NiGHTS snapped, the nightmaren quickly transformed his personality once again, more intensely now as the mist seemed to dance around him. Helen was scared to look him in the eyes. The happy, fun, bubbly NiGHTS they knew before was now a growling, terrifying nightmaren in front of them. This couldn't be the same friend they had just been with in Nightopia.

NiGHTS, unable to control his inner temper lashed out at the two. Helen couldn't see what was happening, but she knew NiGHTS had attacked in some way. The last thing she saw before waking up was NiGHTS rushing up to her furiously, and if Helen wasn't convinced he was a nightmaren before, she sure was now.

But she wouldn't remember it.

The visitor trio took their usual booth at the cafe, Helen ordering herself something to drink like before. Juliet felt awkward, not really sure how to explain what NiGHTS had said to her. If these two weren't who NiGHTS wanted her to find, that meant that her job wasn't quite done yet. She didn't understand why NiGHTS couldn't just visit the dreams of whoever he was looking for, either.

"It's not your fault…" Helen replied after Juliet had finished recalling her dream, "we're not offended that NiGHTS doesn't remeber us. I'm sure he's helped lots of strong visitors, he did get around a lot," she smiled, her eye still twitched a bit.

"What's bothering me are those kids," Will changed the subject, "how can you side with the nightmaren? If we're assuming that's what happened."

"I actually met one of them last night," both Will and Helen eagerly stared at Juliet, "he told me his name… I think it was Marcus? He was at the party."

"What did he want with you?" Helen asked, a bit worried.

"He was all bark and no bite, really. I think he has a history with Nightopia… he mentioned something about it… then Nightmares promised him power or something… I really don't remember that well. He was… confusing."

"If this guys trying to brainwash these kids to join his side this could get weird. I don't know why NiGHTS isn't trying to get all the help he can." Will sounded frustrated, "what I'm wondering is why is Wizeman's asleep through all of this. Is he really that weak now that he can't control his *own* loyal nightmaren?"

"Who's… Wizeman?"

The two stared at her in shock, "He's the *ruler* of Nightmare," Helen responded.

"We helped NiGHTS to try and destroy him. We thought we did but he still came back. 'As long as darkness exists' or whatever."

Helen rolled her eyes, "he was extremely weak after we fought him, he basically went into a form of hiding, not wanting to risk his destruction. I guess NiGHTS has managed to land a hit on him one too many times."

Juliet shook her head, " Those kids mentioned the ruler of Nightmare was helping them, is that Wizeman? NiGHTS hasn't mentioned anything about him. No one has, really."

"It seems like there's a lot of nightmaren activity, though. Wizeman must still be controlling things from behind the curtains," Helen insisted.

"Do you think they're kids from around here? I don't know how else they would've known about the party if they weren't locals."

"I… I think I recognized one of them," Juliet stuttered, "the girl, Alice. I think it was her… she's from our school."

Will flinched a little bit, "she was in the library with us beforehand. She kept peering over at us… I just tried to ignore it at the time."

"That's probably how she found out about the party, then," Helen pieced together, "that's… really creepy. Juliet, you should be careful at school. There isn't much they can do while in the Waking World, but still..."

Juliet froze and looked around the cafe nervously. These kids were spying on her at school… who knows where else they've been following her without her knowing?

Helen sat up from the table, "I'm sorry, I didn't realize the time, I have to get going. I feel bad that we're both unable to help you in Nightopia… but I'd still like to help in any way I can. NiGHTS was our friend, nothing has changed."

"Same here," Will agreed and stood up too, "I gotta run, too, I have practiced in an hour."

"Practice? I thought schools were closed today." Juliet wondered.

Will turned red, "Ah, right. I don't play on the school's team anymore. I'm on the Halfmoon youth team, y'know that hyped up kids team in training to actually become professionals. I don't know how serious they actually are about that, though."

"Oh yeah, I know about that. It's a huge deal here I know, I didn't know you were on it."

"Yup, and you're looking at the star player." Will stood proudly.

"Stop showing off and go already," she joked. After Will left, Helen turned to Juliet and smiled, picking her purse up, "thanks for meeting up again today. I hope we can do it again soon. I mean it when I say I want to help…"

"Oh- uh, sure! I'd love to." Juliet beamed. It felt nice having friends who wanted to actually do stuff with her. Even though she knew it was impossible, she wished NiGHTS could join them sometime too.

NiGHTS took Juliet to the Dream Plaza, and seized dualization with her when they met up with Owl.

"I say, I was wondering when you were going to bring the Visitor here! It was getting a little lonely." Owl cooed.

"Lonely? What am I, chopped shleep? Anyway, I'm going to show Juliet around so you don't bore her to death, old bird!" NiGHTS teased his long time friend.

Owl ruffled his wings offendedly, "I know much more about this place than you do, young one! You didn't even know this place existed years ago!"

NiGHTS sighed in defeat, "Alright you win… I'll let you give Juliet the tour," he looked Owl in the eye and grinned, "if you can catch us!" He swooped up Juliet in his arms and took off, causing the owl to lose several feathers from the large gust of twinkle dust he created.

"Wasn't that a little rude?" Juliet asked NiGHTS as they stopped at a small circle at the end of one of the many paths. "I kind of like Owl…"

"You do?" NiGHTS asked in shocked, "I mean, what I meant was… me and Owl go back, I guess. I found him here, actually, then I helped him establish the Dream Gate," he paused and looked at Juliet, who was listening to him very attentively, "It's just friendly teasing, he enjoys it. I mean he hasn't kicked me out yet, right?"

Juliet chuckled, "I guess not." She looked around the small clearing they were now in. The ground was cobblestone- like in the Dream Gate, but more defined and cleaner. She could hear the trickling of a

nearby stream and the rustling of the leaves from the tall trees towering over that blocked all sunlight from emitting inside. There was a small bird bath in the center. She walked up to it and stared at the worn away plaque on the base.

"Hey NiGHTS, where are we right now?"

"Right now we're at the Dream Plaza. Apparently many years ago it was very lively, and visitors could chat and share dreams together within the plaza. Unlike the Dream Gate, which it's unheard of for visitors to meet one another within dreams… well… I guess that's how it was," he sighed.

"Why choose the Dream Gate over the Plaza? I mean, no offense, but compared to what you just told me the Dream Gate seems rather boring."

NiGHTS shrugged, "I never really knew about the Dream Plaza. It was dismantled before I got here. The Dream Gate was a piece of it Owl and I, and some old friends, recovered."

Juliet nodded, "then I take it that you're a nightmaren too, right?"

NiGHTS flinched, he's never had a dreamer so bluntly point it out, or even figure it out themselves. He hesitated to respond but Juliet didn't seem bothered or concerned, just curious. "Yes," he replied calmly, "I am a nightmaren too…"

"Yeah, I kinda figured it out a while ago during our fight with Crocile. Don't worry, I'm not going to freak out because of that… I trust you, NiGHTS." For some reason, she didn't want to mention how Marcus is the one who told her, something about it felt sensitive but she wasn't sure why.

The now revealed nightmaren smiled, "Thanks Juliet, I trust you too. We're going to kick some nightmare butt together, right? Just not mine, of course."

"Yeah!" Juliet shot up, clenching her fists in determination.

A bright light circled the clearing, and NiGHTS stood defensively not sure what was happening. A large door grew up from the light from

the ground, rooting itself in place. It was similar in appearance to the doors from the Dream Gate Juliet was once pushed into, however this one seemed much more gothic and regal. The doors were black wooded, and the stained glass above covered the entire top of the frame. Juliet could make out the lilac shrubs in the stained glass.

"Doors to Nightopia? Of course!" NiGHTS shouted,"I guess the gate of dreams relocated to where a Visitors Ideya is the strongest… I guess now that would be here! Come on, let's go check out your new nightopia!"

"Why would it be here?" Juliet inquired.

"Owl gave a tour a long time ago when I first found him in this very location. This is apparently where he used to show Visitors their Ideya's power or something like that? I wasn't really listening."

Juliet chuckled at NiGHTS' honesty, "It's sad to think that the Dream Gate is gone, even if I was only there for a short time…"

"Well…" NiGHTS admitted, "the foundation is still there. Unfortunately it's fallen into the Dark Ocean and lost all of it's function in order to protect Visitors from it. I could show you what's left if it'll make you feel better to say goodbye."

"Hmm… are you sure it's okay to do that?"

"Nope," NiGHTS grinned, "Owl doesn't have to know, though. Come on," NiGHTS held his hand out to dualize, "let's go. A little danger was never dangerous."

Taking his hand, Juliet chuckled, "I'm pretty sure that's what dangerous means, NiGHTS."

The two dualized and NiGHTS took control of the flight, creating a large paraloop in the sky far enough away from the rest of the world so as to not destroy anything. He burst through the wormhole as Juliet gasped, never experiencing a paraloop before.

They were spit out on the other side, crash landing right into the broken down Dream Gate. "Sorry about that landing," NiGHTS looked embarrassed, "Reala's actually a lot better at handling his

paraloops than I am, believe it or not." Juliet recalled Reala in Lilac Valley from before, when he had summoned the other nightmaren and proceeded to retreat through his own paraloop. Definitely smoother than NiGHTS' creation.

The two, still dualized together, picked themselves off of the path and fly back up into the air. Juliet watched as pieces of the Dream Gate bopped around in the dark waters.

"What is that water, NiGHTS? Some kind of lake?"

"It's the Dark Ocean," NiGHTS frowned, "it's still a mystery to me, since I never really knew of its existence until I discovered the Dream Plaza. Owl says it has the power to destroy a Visitor's soul if they fall in and become consumed by their own unconscious…"

"That doesn't sound fun…" Juliet matched NiGHTS' frown. "That's why you said it's dangerous now… it's too close to this Dark Ocean."

NiGHTS looked over at the connected Visitor and smiled, "you're really smart, you know that?"

Juliet could see from above where her door once was, now completely void of any light. "Do you think there's a way to be able to lift the Dream Gate back up?"

"Maybe, it would take some serious God-like power to do that, though."

"Is that like...Wizeman? Could you tell me about him?"

To her surprise, NiGHTS didn't freak out or pressure her into where she heard about him. Juliet figured Wizeman must be a big name in the Night Dimension.

"Wizeman was my creator. I guess… in your terms he was my father." NiGHTS admitted sadly.

"Was? What happened?" Juliet pressed.

"I've managed to do my own part in stopping his plans. Taking over Nightopia, the Waking World, you name it. He was pretty weak from

all that, but he always kept coming back. I was supposed to destroy him, and all traces of Nightmaren that existed, I wanted to. But one day he just… was gone. He destroyed himself for a reason I still don't know. All the nightmaren managed to remain but… at the cost of the Night Dimension itself, I guess. I think it's his fault Visitor's stopped showing up, and why the Dream Gate met this fate."

"So he's not around anymore?" Juliet summarized.

NiGHTS simply nodded, "Wizeman is no longer a threat to Nightopia. That's why I'm so concerned with why Reala was trying to steal your Ideya before."

The two flew a bit higher, letting the whole island come into eyesight. The large staircase that towered over the world was the only thing that didn't appear to be damaged at all. In fact, most of the main part of the hub world was still in an almost perfect condition. Juliet flew down to the main clearing of the Dream Gate for a better look at it. Most of its light was missing due to it being so close to the Dark Ocean, which is why she was unable to pass through her door on her way to Nightopia the other night. From where she was at the moment you could hardly tell it's surrounding islands had been so destroyed. Owl had mentioned to Juliet before that the Ideya she had helped bring life to the Dream Gate, maybe all it needed was a little bit more to save it.

The two flew around the upper part of the world, passing by the mines and through the forest. When they came to the small lake that still resided in the forest Juliet undualized with the nightmaren, landing right on her feet in the grass.

"I noticed them before when I was first here, what are those statues of, NiGHTS?" She pointed to the rippling water, where three statues that appeared to have been dismantled were sunken into the sand. "There's a couple by the gate too."

"I actually don't know," NiGHTS shrugged, "I figured it was just some decorative stuff Owl got rid of during spring cleaning."

Juliet giggled, and looked back towards the lake. Something strange caught her eye this time, a small glare from under the water. She

kneeled down by the water to try and get a closer look, but the moon's reflection rippling in it's waves made it hard to see anything. Reluctantly, she held her breath and dunked her head under the water. At the very bottom of the lake Juliet could make out a bright colored, smooth object almost completely covered by sand. She lifted her head up to take a breath, "It looks like something was buried under there."

"Hm?" NiGHTS flew over the lake, trying to peer into it. "Leave it to me!" He proclaimed, throwing an elaborate looking golden mask on his face. He dove into the water and Juliet watched as his form morphed into a dolphin as he hit the water.

The Dolphin NiGHTS swam quickly to the lake's floor and dug it's nose in the sand to uncover more of the object. He swam back up to the surface and splashed into the air, balancing what looked to be an orb on his nose. Juliet clapped.

"Thank you, thank you!" Dolphin NiGHTS bowed his head slightly before flying out back into his natural form, holding the orb in his hands.

"So what is it?" Juliet stood up cheering.

"Not really sure…" NiGHTS somewhat lied, the object was an unfortunate familiarity to him. "It must've been under that lake for a long time. The disruption of the Dream Gate must've moved some of that sand off."

NiGHTS flew down to meet the Visitor, handing the orb off. "Why don't you hold onto it. Think of it as a souvenir!"

Juliet beamed, "Yeah! I'll put it in my bag and- wait… will it still be in my bag when I go back to sleep next time?"

"It should. Your dream self is always the same, just like your waking self!"

Juliet smiled, feeling rather relaxed and happy all of the sudden as she placed the lilac orb in her backpack and zipped it up safely. "Maybe we can ask Owl about it!"

"Maybe," NiGHTS nervously chuckled, "speaking of, we should be getting back to the Dream Plaza before the old bird loses his marbles looking for us."

Juliet nodded in agreement and took NiGHTS open hand to dualize once again.

Juliet had to wake up not long after returning to the Dream Plaza, leaving NiGHTS by himself again. Excluding Owl.

NiGHTS retreated back to the main hub in front of the castle. Owl was gone, most likely checking up on the Nightopians in Nightopia leaving NiGHTS to have some alone time.

There was a rustling in the bushes, and NiGHTS jumped up into defensive mode as usual. It could've been Owl returning from Nightopia, but he couldn't be too sure with all of the recent nightmaren activity.

"Owl, is that you?" NiGHTS asked uncertainly, slowly approaching the bushes next to the castle. The plaza was too dark to make out any exact shapes, but one look at the ugliest highlighter yellow color in the leaves and NiGHTS knew *exactly* who it was.

NiGHTS immediately jumped the bush and grabbed the intruder, pinning them down to the ground.

"Jolten! What do you think you're doing here? What, was last time not enough for you?"

"L-Look! I don't want any trouble! Nightmayr he's… he's god crazy! You gotta hide me, NiGHTS. I promise I won't pull anything, I swear! Get me out of that hellhole!" Jolten pleaded while struggling against NiGHTS' grip.

"Wait- what?" NiGHTS loosened his grip, and flew back to let Jolten sit up and pull themself together. "You're… rebelling?" he grinned.

"Look, traitor," Jolten snapped, "I'm not *rebellin* g. Nightmayr is crazy. *Every* goddamn nightmaren wants out of there."

NiGHTS crossed his arms, "well I guess you aren't acting very

threatening right now but, nothing is different there," Jolten grumbled a bit, "anyway, what makes you think I'm going to trust you at all? You're worse than Reala is."

"Don't ever compare me to anyone again!" Jolten yelled.

"You mean like how you compared yourself to me all those years ago? That's a little hypocritical, isn't it?"

"Things change, I'm my own nightmaren now. I figured that out a long time ago."

"Well, good for you," NiGHTS responded in a sarcastic tone, "now leave."

"Wait wait wait! Please just let me stay here. I won't even bother you or the bird or anyone just let me hide here!"

"How bad is it over there that you need the hide? I don't trust you, Jolten. You tried to hurt my friend and I'll never forgive you. Besides, if it's that orb you want it's long gone." NiGHTS sighed.

"Don't you get it, idiot? That orb is the reason this is all happening!" Jolten shrieked, clinging onto NiGHTS' leg.

NiGHTS tried shaking the graveling nightmaren off his leg but had no success. He finally gave up and just let them hang there. "What exactly is 'this' that's happening? Not like I'm believing anything you say."

"Nightmayr! I don't know how many times I have to say it! I've seen Reala take hits from Wizeman lots of times, but nothing like this! We have to stop him, NiGHTS!-" Jolten froze, and stared right at NiGHTS' frowning face.

"'We?'"

"I mean- you! You and that girl! Yeah, you two need to stop him! I don't know what he's planning but it's not good."

"Ok calm down Juliet. Could you… start from the top for me? Who exactly is this Nightmayr…? You don't know what he's planning?"

"No one really does! I guess he wants to take over Nightopia and 'do what Wizeman failed to do' whatever that means, but we all know he's hiding something! Even Reala doesn't know his intentions. Please, just let me stay here?" Jolten got on their knees and started begging. This was really pathetic, NiGHTS thought.

NiGHTS let out an annoyed sigh, "fine. But don't bother any of us. If I see you do one thing out of line you're out. Kapeesh?" Jolten nodded. "Alright, I need to go find Owl. You're safe here, Jolten. For now. I don't know what's been going on over there, so you can help to fill me in once I get back" He glared before flying off.

A few nights have gone by, Juliet and NiGHTS resumed their adventures within Lilac Valley on repeat, the world was much safer now that Crocile was defeated. Juliet entered the Dream Plaza that night, but was unable to locate NiGHTS. She figured he was off doing whatever dream creatures do, but it felt like he was *always* doing that. Even Owl was nowhere to be found. Maybe they were waiting for her in her Nightopia, she thought. While on her walk over to the door, a low grumbling noise from the bushes overhead made her flinch. Juliet stood up cautiously and walked over to the source of the muttering, "Um… hello?"

There was a yelp, and a bright yellow figure leapt out of the bushes, "Hey- don't scare me like that!" They shouted.

"Ehh! Sorry! *You* startled *me* ! Wait are you a… nightmaren!?"

Jolten crossed their arms and pouted. "The name's Jolten. No need to introduce yourself, I already know all about you."

Juliet shifted uncomfortably, "That's a little…. Creepy. What do you want from me!?"

"The purple one let me hide here until you all do your thing and save the night dimension. No rush, though."

"Hide? What are you hiding from…?"

Jolten flew into Juliet's face, "Nightmayr! That guy is crazy!"

"Did you say Nightmayr?" Juliet gasped as her inner lightbulb turned on.

"Jolten! What did I say!" NiGHTS flew down in between the two and glared at Jolten.

"Hey- hey! Calm down! I didn't touch her or anything. Can't I introduce myself? Besides, *she* approached *me* !" Jolten yelped defensively.

NiGHTS turned around and gave Juliet a questioning look, "You did?"

"I heard noises so I went to investigate. Turns out it was Jolten mumbling about… whatever it was they were mumbling about."

NiGHTS sighed and turned back to face Jolten, "Alright, you're off the hook this time. Come on, Juliet. Let's go to Nightopia!"

Juliet smiled, "Alright! See you later, Jolten!" NiGHTS was rushing Juliet away, he clearly still didn't trust Jolten being in their hideout.

"We need to find your ideya of intelligence, next. So keep your eye out while we're in Nightopia." NiGHTS reminded the Visitor as he pushed her away from Jolten.

"NiGHTS, Jolten mentioned that Nightmayr person. Did you find anything out?" Juliet inquired as soon as the two entered the safety of Lilac Valley.

"Yes!" NiGHTS beamed, "I meant to bring it up as soon as we got together tonight. From what Jolten mentioned he's an unknown Nightmaren that showed up out of the nowhere and took Wizeman's throne."

"Unknown Nightmaren? How can a Nightmaren be unknown, aren't you all like… a family? I mean you knew Reala, and Crocile."

"That's the tricky part with this, and why Jolten is all freaked out by him. I don't know why the Nightmaren would just willingly let this guy order them around, *especially* Reala." NiGHTS leaned over on his crossed legs in the air, "Reala wouldn't take that from just anyone."

"Are you and Reala close?" She asked innocently.

NiGHTS chuckled, "you could say that. We're the only two 1st Level Nightmaren in existence. That's why Wizeman threw a tantrum when I dipped!"

"I wondered how you could be a Nightmaren but help save Nightopia… I guess it makes sense you just rebelled. Don't know what else I was thinking…" Juliet frowned, a bit stumped. They had an inside source from Nightmare in Jolten now, but even he wasn't much help with explaining who this Nightmayr is.

Chapter 6

"Owl, what have I done?" NiGHTS croaked. He was sitting on the steps outside of the castle, being comforted by his feathered friend.

"It is not your fault young one," Owl nodded, "I don't think I've ever seen you act that way before. Is something troubling you?"

*" **Yeah** something is troubling me. I just did something **unforgivable** ," the nightmaren groaned. Owl simply patted his back with his wing awkwardly.*

"Hoo, well, I'm sure they'll come back. You're all friends, right? I think you all just need to talk. I'm rather curious about this orb myself but, ah, well I guess there's nothing more we can find out about now."

NiGHTS scrunched his face up, and pulled his body in closer, "No, we can't talk."

Owl perched himself beside NiGHTS and sat in silence, waiting for him to continue. Though, the old bird had already figured out where this was going.

"I did something… bad. Something I wanted to...forget about myself. They won't remember anything… they'll never come back here. I'll never scare them again." He held his breath, waiting for Owl to begin scolding him on his carelessness. Instead, he was just returned with more silence from his now only friend.

"You were right," Owled cooed, "a monster is not who you are. You still have a lot to learn."

NiGHTS looked down, "I just… I guess I wanted to keep my promise with Claris. I promised I'd keep it safe… it meant a lot to her for some reason. I never really figured out why. She said it could hear her…?" He flew up, loosening his body a bit after holding so much tension in it, getting ready to take off like usual.

"Hoo! Well, what are you going to do now?"

"Find some new visitors to help- have a new start. I'm not going to mess up this time!"

It was Monday morning, Maria knew that, or at least the groggy feeling of staying up too late on a Sunday night knew that. Her alarm was buzzing her to get up but she didn't want to move. She hasn't had a decent sleep in ages, would 5 minutes really do any harm? Maria tiredly lifted her hand to slam her alarm off. It's not like she had to get up for school anything, she already graduated high school and was home for the time being. But, she got up anyway. Mostly out of habit, and also to see if Will needed a ride to school, which he usually didn't. It was an excuse to not be sleeping in bed until noon, though.

Maria got out of bed and threw on a random T-shirt that was lying on her floor for who knows how long. She brushed her hair, pulling it up into a ponytail and made herself look at least somewhat presentable.

Will was already downstairs eating, but she could tell he was still half asleep. She

walked over to him and lightly hit him on the shoulder to wake him up. He jumped in his seat in response and glared at Maria. "Ok, ok. I'm awake now."

Maria laughed, "Sorry, falling asleep in your breakfast has been a habit lately." She looked down at the table and noticed just a small cup of yogurt, "that's all you're having for breakfast?"

Will shrugged, obviously annoyed by his sister's remark. "I'm not that hungry, it's just breakfast," he muttered.

"The *most important* meal of day," She joked, "anyway, it looks like it's going to rain this morning. Need me to drive you to school?"

"I guess," Will muttered again.

Maria sighed, wondering why she even bothered to try anymore, and left to the kitchen to make breakfast for herself. She turned the stove

on and took a couple of eggs out of the fridge. She wasn't really a fan of breakfast foods, but she knew she'd regret not eating. She finished making her eggs and sat down at the table. Will had already gone upstairs to change for school, so she was sitting alone.

It was always quiet in the mornings, and maybe that's another reason she liked it so much. Getting up at 5am to see the sunrise and updating her blog before anyone else is awake is always special. She couldn't wait to move out and live in her own flat.

There was a knock at the door, and Maria wondered who would be here this early in the morning. She slowly opened the door, and on her front porch were three kids, each wearing a different bright colored costume mask; a lion, a penguin and a mouse.

"Trick or treat!" They all shouted in unison.

Maria laughed, feeling a little uncomfortable "It's a little early for trick or treating isn't it? Are you guys friends of Will's or something?"

The three looked at each other and smiled, and looked right back at Maria who now had a confused and nervous expression as the early celebrators didn't respond.

Will had already put his school uniform on and was on his way out of his room to leave when he heard a scream from downstairs.

"Maria?" he called after pausing for a moment. There was no response. "Maria?!" he called louder. Still no response. Will slowly walked downstairs and peered around the corner into the kitchen. He could hear the front door creaking, being blown open and closed by the wind and drawing his attention in that direction. Peeking around to the front he saw Maria lying on the ground.

Will ran over to her in panic. Nothing seemed to be wrong with her, there weren't any injuries and she was also breathing calmly. She was… asleep?

He ran out of the open door and looked around the yard. There wasn't anyone around, no one was even walking down the street. Will was about to turn back and return inside when something on the lawn caught his eye. He cautiously walked over to the unknown object and retrieved it. It was an animal mask, one of a lion, the same as the ones the nightmare kids at the party were wearing.

When Will returned inside he moved Maria onto the sofa and went to grab his bag, stuffing the lion mask inside it. It was still a while before he had to leave for school, but he had to go see Juliet as soon as possible. He was prepared to have to wait in front of the school for Juliet to arrive, figuring she would come when all the other kids did. To his surprise, Juliet was already about to walk through the front door of the school at the same time he arrived there. Will ran, shouting her name before she could step through the entrance.

"What? What is it?" Juliet asked turning around, "can it wait until after school? I have to go and see my fr-"

"No! I mean… sorry. I didn't mean to yell," he held the side of his head, "look, something weird happened this morning. Something happened to my sister, I think your whole situation has something to do with it."

Juliet was perplexed at what this could possibly have to do with her, "what happened exactly?"

"Well, Maria came downstairs and everything was normal, right? So, I left to go upstairs and all the sudden I heard a scream."

"Was it her?"

Will shrugged nervously, "Sounded like her, I don't know. She never screams but who else could it have been. Anyway, I went downstairs and I found her on the ground asleep with the front door wide open. She wasn't… hurt at least that I know of but she just won't wake up."

"That's a little weird. This hasn't happened... before?"

Will shook his head, "No, can't say my sister just randomly falls

unconscious often."

Juliet rolled her eyes and smiled at the snarky reply, "Well, why do you think this has something to do with Nightopia?"

As if he was waiting for her to ask that, Will dropped his bag on the ground and pulled out the lion mask, looking up at Juliet with a serious expression, "because I found this on my lawn."

Juliet flinched, "That's what Marcus was wearing at the party!"

Will nodded, "I don't know what in the world they'd want with my sister… maybe they overheard me and you and think we're involved but… since I can't go to Nightopia maybe you can find her?"

"You think she's in Nightopia? Why?"

"It's… it's just a feeling. I don't know why but they wouldn't just make someone fall asleep like that, especially if they thought she was already involved. I don't know… I don't know what to do. I guess, you're the only one that can figure this out right now," he sighed, Juliet could tell he was feeling useless to the situation.

"I think I understand… kinda. NiGHTS and I will find her if she really is with those guys. It'll be in and out, okay?" Juliet tried to reassure him.

"Thanks… and sorry for causing more problems for you. I know this dream stuff isn't exactly easy," Will laughed awkwardly trying to lighten the mood. "You can go and see your friend now. It might be better if we aren't seen together for a while."

Juliet nodded in return, a little upset, and ran inside the school . The hallways were still fairly empty, but she knew students had already begun to swarm the building. Alaia was standing by her locker, she had clearly been waiting for a long time.

"Oh… hey. Sorry you had to wait," she quietly greeted.

"You said you usually got here around 8," Alaia responded nervously, "you're not avoiding me are you? I know things got a bit awkward but…"

"No!" She quickly jumped in, "Something just came up and my schedule got thrown off a bit. So uh… what did you want to talk about?"

"Well I stopped by the cafe yesterday to see… what was her name? The waitress there. She said she got the OK to sing one of the weeks in November. I can't make it but… I figured I'd let you know. Maybe you and those other friends of yours wanna go."

Juliet closed her locker and frowned. She wasn't sure if Alaia was lying or not. Maybe them not hanging out was for the best, if something happened to Will just because they were together, something could happen to Alaia too. Who knows who could be listening in on every conversation she has? "Thanks for letting me know. I promised her I'd go see since it is technically my fault… I got a little carried away with helping there didn't I?"

Alaia smiled, "Yeah, you've become quite the preacher lately. It's not really like you to be this positive and open but… it's not a bad change."

Not a bad change… Juliet thought.

The day began to pass by terribly slow. Most teachers were easy on the work, though. A lot of the classes were spent goofing around or talking about what everyone did over the weekend. It was hard to talk about what she did over the weekend, considering most of it was spent asleep. The rest of the day was spent thinking of how she was going to approach NiGHTS about what happened. The last time she brought up Will and Helen NiGHTS freaked out. Maybe she shouldn't mention their names… but how would she explain what happened? Juliet couldn't lie to someone like NiGHTS. How would they even find someone in that place?

"Hey, Juliet!" NiGHTS flew down to greet his new friend excitedly as she entered the Dream Plaza for the night, "you're here early tonight! That gives us more time to play in Nightopia together!"

NiGHTS began flying in a figure-8 motion around Juliet- careful not to accidentally paraloop the girl. Juliet stayed silent, not exactly sure how to explain the situation to NiGHTS. He was rather happy to see

her made obvious by his gleeful flying, it would hurt her to ruin his night like this. She shifted her weight a bit before finally cutting off the nightmarens joyous flight.

"A-actually, NiGHTS… something's come up…"

NiGHTS lowered himself, and hovered at the dreamer's height, cocking his head to the side, "Huh? What is it, did you find out some more information on those Nightmare kids?"

"Uh… well…" Juliet's voice trembled as she spoke, "did any other visitors stop by earlier?"

NiGHTS hovered in front of her with a confused expression on his face, then shook his head, "nope, you're the only one that's stopped by recently for a few years I'm afraid. What's up?"

"Well…" Juliet felt like she was frozen. How was she going to explain to NiGHTS what happened without making him freak out again? "A friend I hang out with at school has a sister… and she fell asleep out of nowhere and won't wake up."

NiGHTS nodded, still with a confused look but trying to puzzle together what Juliet was trying to explain, "you think it has something to do with Nightopia?"

Juliet shook her head in response, "no, I'm almost positive it does. Remember those Nightmare kids from that party I went to? That night they were all wearing these animal costume masks. My friend… found one outside after what happened earlier."

"So these nightmare kids did something to make your friend's sister fall asleep? But why would they do that?"

"That… I don't know. We think- *I* think," Juliet quickly corrected, "that they might think people I've been hanging out with are involved maybe… but I've never even met this girl before so that doesn't really make sense."

"I don't know why she would be in the Night Dimension, though," NiGHTS tried to rationalize the situation, "but the whole idea of these kids dreaming in nightmare has me worried. This could be

how they recruit people. It could be why no Visitors have shown up for years."

"They have recruited someone from my town already… I think we need to go and check Nightmare out!"

The floating nightmaren put his hands on his hips and glanced away from the visitor for a moment. "Alright," he sighed, "give me the details. Who are we looking for, exactly?"

"Uh… well… like I said I don't actually *know* her. I don't know what she looks like or anything…" Juliet got quiet. She didn't think she'd really get this far with NiGHTS.

"Well that's helpful. You don't know *anything* ?"

"All I know is she won't wake up and these other dreamers are behind it and Will's a little freaked out abou-"

Juliet stopped herself stared up at NiGHTS, both with the same frozen shocked expression.

"I-I mean my frie-"

"They do remember," NiGHTS frowned , obviously assuming before already.

"So you *do* know him…" she caught NiGHTS in his lie.

"Oh..! I don't." NiGHTS perked up, crossing his arms and glanced away once again, "never met either of them once. Why are you still asking me about them?"

"I...I'm not, and I never mentioned a 'them'..."

NiGHTS looked back at Juliet regretfully, he could see the genuine concern in her eyes. He knew he had to come forth with the truth now.

"Helen and Will…" NiGHTS heaved a sigh, and begrudgingly began explaining, "used to visit Nightopia all the time. They helped me save it once, actually… they were my closest friends at the time," He

crossed his legs in the air and leaned over.

"NiGHTS… we all make mistakes, it's part of learning, right? If you keep running from things… they'll never get better…" Juliet frowned.

"I stole their Ideya. I became a nightmaren again… I hurt them. I thought that I had left that behind me. But I don't know if I'll ever be able to escape my nightmaren instincts..." NiGHTS paused in shock, staring at the girl before him. For some reason everything he was holding inside of him began spilling out to this visitor he had only known for a few weeks.

"But you never meant it! I can tell, NiGHTS! If you don't try to fix th-"

"Juliet!" NiGHTS shouted.

Juliet straightened her posture, and looked up at NiGHTS with a serious expression on her face, "I don't believe that. NiGHTS, ever since I met you I've been so much happier! I feel… more confident now! Because of you I realized that change isn't necessarily a bad thing, and it happens all the time! We can't give up now! If you want to step down, I understand. I'll just do this myself, I don't really have a choice since it's following me everywhere. But I know you're not a bad person, and maybe there's a reason for your actions in the past because of that. You wouldn't even hurt a nightopian."

"I'm sorry, Juliet." NiGHTS sighed, "I guess… not understanding what happened to me in the past has been building up, I didn't mean to spill so much out onto you. I've never done that to a Visitor before… usually *I'm* the one listening to *their* problems."

"It's ok. You've helped me, it's only natural that I help you too!"

"Careful, you might put me out of a job," NiGHTS chuckled.

Juliet's expression lit up, "So that means you'll help, and see your friends again?"

"Well… the thing is… it's been a long time and I don't really know how to fix things at this point," the nightmaren shut his eyes.

"If it's you, NiGHTS, I don't think *anyone* would mind." She smiled.

NiGHTS grunted and spun around away from Juliet. He cupped his hands around his mouth and began shouting for Jolten.

"Hey, hey!" Jolten screamed, jumping out from some bushes nearby, "not so loud, okay! What in the world do you even *want* ? Thought I wasn't allowed near you guys!"

"Well that rule certainly didn't stop you from eavesdropping over there, did it?" The purple nightmaren crossed his arms and stared at Jolten.

"I was *nappin'* pal. Not *everyone* cares about what boring conversations a traitor must have with a visitor."

"Jolten, if I recall… aren't you a traitor too?" Juliet frowned, not wanting a fight to start.

"Hey!" they snapped, "I ain't no traitor! I'd never betray Wizeman like this annoying scrap right here! Nightmayr's different, he's *no* Wizeman that's for sure."

"Oh, right. Sorry." Juliet backed away from Jolten, who had sparks flying from their clenched fists.

"Listen, Jolten. I need you to do a favor. You know Nightmare better than anyone right now, and I have something I need to do." NiGHTS tried to sound as calm as possible. He still didn't trust Jolten, and if they decided they were going to pull anything, NiGHTS would be there. "Sneak Juliet with you to wherever Nightmayr is residing. If you get caught, say you captured her so you won't get hurt… I know what they do to traitors and you're still a newbie at this. Juliet, don't worry if something happens. I'll be there as fast as I can. I promise." NiGHTS smiled at his friend and crouched down to eye level.

Juliet gave a joking skeptical look, "Pinky promise?"

The nightmaren blinked a few times before giggling, and holding his pinky out in return, " *Pinky promise* ."

Jolten had led Juliet to the large cobblestone bridge that resided at the far edge of the plaza. She was hesitant at first when the nightmaren had explained to them the bridge connected right into

Nightmare, but was assured the location of the Nightmare Plaza was empty, and has been for a long time, same as the Dream Plaza.

"Who exactly is this guy anyway?" Juliet finally let out the question she's been dying to ask since day one. Not even NiGHTS knew, and he was a Nightmaren, too.

"I don't know!" Jolten shouted angrily, "he just showed up one day and never left Wizeman's side. If you ask me, I think he's the one who actually made Wizeman kick the can. Then he decided that *he's* the new ruler or whatever. That he somehow can become more powerful than Wizeman."

"So he just showed up and started bossing you around? That's a little anticlimactic…"

"Just a little."

The rest of the way was pretty silent. The bridge was a lot longer than Juliet had anticipated it to be, in the end it made sense, though. After all, the dream world and the nightmare world shouldn't be neighbors anyway. The lanterns that lit the sides of the bridge became dimmer and dimmer as they continued forward.

"Hey… wait." Juliet stopped walking, and glanced behind her in the direction of the Dream Plaza.

Jolten grumbled a 'what' in response. Being this close to Nightmare, they *really* didn't want to stop.

"Why didn't we fly across?" She looked up at Jolten, who's eyes went wide as they crossed their arms.

"What do you mean? *You* can't fly, idiot."

"I mean… together? Like when NiGHTS and I… what did he call it? Dualize? Why didn't we just do that?"

Jolten let out an annoyed sigh. They knew the girl was just curious and concerned, she had a right to be. But he hated being compared to NiGHTS. "Because I don't cheat my powers? What do you want me to say?"

Juliet was taken back by the nightmarens snappy response, "I… I don't…"

"Look, kid," Jolten sighed, annoyed at both them and the visitor, "I actually can't dualize. I can't paraloop. I can't form bombs outta the sky. All I can do is make flashing lights and loud noises. Sorry I'm not as cool as NiGHTS or Reala or any other super cool powerful Nightmarens you may know." Their voice got quieter as they talked, even choking up a bit. They dropped their arms to their sides frustratingly, and continued to fly towards Nightmare, Juliet frantically jogging behind them.

"Well I mean, that's still pretty cool! I saw you forming lightning in your hand earlier. If you ask me, that's way cooler than making some dumb doom portal." Juliet ran behind Jolten grinning, mostly just trying to get on his good side. Jolten never responded, but Juliet was sure she saw him smile a little bit.

Now it was really silent. Juliet didn't understand why Jolten was so sensitive over that question. Well, she did. But to her it wasn't anything to get defensive about. She wished Jolten could understand but… it was best to just stay quiet until they arrived at the other side of the bridge. She didn't want to make him any more angry, as he *was* her tour guide for the evening.

The Nightmare Plaza was, just as Juliet has expected, dark. It looked like your stereotypical abandoned graveyard, like it came straight out of some gritty low budget Halloween movie. Tall dark green plants of unknown species broke through the cobblestone of the walkway, and tall black gothic fences surrounded the entire plaza like a prison. It was no wonder this place died long before the Dream Plaza. What visitor in their right mind would *choose* to come here?

Jolten had already taken the lead by about 10 feet, clearly not wanting to stay and bird watch. Juliet quickly jogged up to the nightmaren, confused as to where they were going to go from here. Nothing really made sense in the Night Dimension. Worlds and Realms were all over the place, there was never a set entrance or exit to anywhere. It was just one big changing maze.

The two walked along paths and into portals for what seemed like centuries, and Juliet was beginning to think this was just a lost cause. *There's no shame in calling a quits…* she thought.

"There," Jolten stopped very abruptly, pointing to a big cloud of fog in the distance.

Juliet squinted and stared at the fog for a while, but shook her head, "You mean Nightmayr just chills in a big pool of fog?"

"No you dunce," they spat, "we're in his lair. His main hub is down through the fog. The guy's a lunatic I know, but trust me. It's there. My work here is done," the yellow nightmaren turned around and began to fly away from the dreamer, who called their name in immediate response.

"What do you think you're doing? I can't just go *alone!* "

"Look kid, you're nice and all. But my promise was to take you here, not walk right into it with you. This is where I head back to my safe spot, and you be a clueless little visitor and walk right into what's obviously a trap. Frankly, I don't want to stick around here one bit."

"Well…" Juliet stuttered a bit, "Can you at least just… wait here with me? Until NiGHTS gets here?"

"No way, Jose! The longer I stick around the more of a chance that lunatic'll find me and destroy me for being the only nightmaren with enough guts to cross him."

Jolten managed to fly away a few more feet, until a second call of their name from Juliet made them cease once again.

"You know…" Juliet grinned, "If NiGHTS finds out you left me here alone… I doubt he'd let you even have one *foot* in the Dream Plaza. He'll kick you out before you can even *say* Nightmayr."

"Eugh…" Jolten let out a defeated groan. They did a 180 back towards Juliet, and returned to their spot right next to her. "I don't want any small talk, though. Let's just sit here and wait for that purple lump to get here, if he even knows *how.* I don't think he's stepped foot in nightmare for decades . "

"I'm sure he'll find a way, he's NiGHTS!" She smiled, but Jolten just looked away and remained silent.

Juliet sat down on the edge of the cliff before the pool of fog. She pulled her knees into her chest and continued to stare down at the swirling clouds in the distance. You'd think she'd be used to all this by now, but it was still so surreal to her.

Her train of thought was interrupted by the sound of footsteps shuffling behind her. She turned around to see Helen running towards her eagerly.

Juliet stood up to run and meet her halfway, thankful to see each other. She glanced over Helen's shoulder a bit confused though. "Where's NiGHTS and Will?"

"They're…" she glanced behind her, "...somewhere. I ran ahead of them a while ago… against NiGHTS' wishes." Helen laughed, blushing a little, "I guess I just got excited being here again. Well, not *here* . It's creepy here."

Juliet let out a small laugh, "Well it's nice you got here so fast, I was getting lonely."

Jolten grunted, "You act as if I haven't been here the whole time."

"It's not like you were that great of a company in the first place…" Juliet mumbled, surprised Jolten was still even here.

"Who's that?" Helen asked.

"Oh… that's Jolten," Juliet assumed she was referring to the nightmaren, "I… really don't know that much. I *think* they're on our side?"

"That's reassuring." Helen nervously smiled.

Jolten groaned again and began swerving around impatiently. Juliet could tell they felt heavily unsafe being here, and she didn't blame them for not wanting to be here. *She* didn't even want to be here.

She and Helen both peered back down at the abyss below them.

Juliet wondered how big this place would even be, and how they would ever even *begin* to look for Maria. Her tenseness must have been noticed by Helen, who gently placed her hand on Juliet's shoulder and assured her it would be okay.

"We're all in this together now, right?" She smiled.

"Hey! Juliet!" NiGHTS called cheerily from the distance.

"NiGHTS!" She turned around to greet her friend as he approached her. Will was right behind him, jogging to keep up.

"Looks like everyone's here," NiGHTS smiled. Juliet could sense the hint of nervousness behind it, though. NiGHTS had every right to feel uncomfortable right now, but she hoped he would eventually get over it and move on. The two made eye contact, and Juliet gave him a reassuring smile and was returned with a nod from the nightmaren.

"Well, this is where I take my leave," Jolten turned to fly away but NiGHTS had gripped their sleeve, pulling them back down.

"Jolten, would you mind just… waiting here? Incase anything happens?" NiGHTS said quietly to the other. He stated it as a question, but it was obvious Jolten would have no say in the matter. Jolten begrudgingly agreed to stay and wait, and Juliet wondered if they could trust them not to fly off while they were gone.

NiGHTS turned to face the three dreamers and held his hands out to them, "the only way we're getting through that is by flying. It's… been awhile since I've done this, I don't know how much power it's going to take but… I think there's enough Ideya with the three of you here to do it."

Helen and Will glanced over at each other and nodded, like they clearly understood what NiGHTS was referring to. Juliet on the other hand was absolutely clueless. She assumed they were dualizing due to having to fly but how do all three of them do that? The rest had already touched each others hands with one another, and waited for Juliet to do the same.

She held her breath and gently touched finger tips with NiGHTS and Helen. The familiar feeling of dualizing had struck her immediately as the bright light absorbed the foursome. When Juliet's vision fixated, two other NiGHTS were floating in front of her, also adjusting to the strange sensation.

"How's this for a surprise, Jules?" All three NiGHTS asked at once, causing Juliet to flinch a bit.

"I didn't know you could dualize with more than one person! NiGHTS, that's amazing!" The visitor beamed.

"It's not something he can do often," Helen explained, "it takes a lot of strength to do it. There's only been one time we've had to do it."

"I usually only do it when it's extremely necessary," NiGHTS had added, "just now… it seems to be the easiest way to all get down there together without a pile of visitors grabbing on my back. We also don't know how many nightmaren are waiting down there."

Juliet flew towards the abyss, and anxiously glanced down again. Now they were actually going to do it… go down there. It felt strange, and like this was it, but she knew this was only the beginning to whatever is going on in the Dream World.

"Jeez, how far down do you think it is?" Both other NiGHTS flew next to Juliet and peered down as well.

"Only one way to find out," Will grinned, and took off the ground. "Race you two to the bottom!"

Helen grunted in annoyance and raced down too right behind him. Both had already disappeared into the fog.

Juliet turned around to see Jolten one last time. They smiled in defeat and gave the girl a thumbs up. Smiling, she returned the good luck, and started to fly down into the unknown.

"Who's a good nightmaren? Who's a good nightmaren?" Nightmayr was petting the recently defeated Crocile, who was rolled over on

his back. The Nightmaren leader was viciously rubbing the 2nd levels tummy. Crocile had his large forked tongue loped to the side and was making a strange gurgling sound- probably the equivalent to purring.

"Did those mean visitor hurt you? Did she hurt you?" Nightmayr repeated his puppy-like tone.

Crocile groaned a yes, but continued to gurgle has Nightmayr rubbed his tummy.

"They'll pay for that. Yes they will!"

"Uh… Nightmayr…" Reala's voice echoed from behind the two.

Nightmayr frantically stood up and recollected himself, he turned to face the general and scowled at him, "Have you considered knocking, Reala?"

Reala hesitantly bowed, "Forgive me, but it was *you* who asked to see me, sir."

Nightmayr crossed his arms, "Yes, that's right. After the recent defeat of Crocile, the little visitor recovered her Ideya of Purity. One Ideya, but an Ideya nonetheless. We can't allow this to happen again. I'm already working on *that* , however there's something I need you to do."

"Of course, sir. What is it?"

"The Visitor has something I want, one of my little friends saw her with it. Forget about the Ideya, I want *that* ."

"Yes of course. But what are we looking for?"

"An orb. Lilac in color, I'm sure you'll… sense its energy once you arrive. I would go myself but I'm busy doing other things you know."

Reala bowed his head, "We will find the orb and bring it to you."

"I know you will," Reala flinched, "One more thing. It appears a little nightmaren decided to run away from me. If you see them… bring

them back to me, will you?" Nightmayr grinned.

Reala bowed once again, but knowing he couldn't even catch the *last* nightmaren that ran away, "I will go find Rachael, we will leave shortly and return once the mission is complete."

"Excellent… now," Nightmayr coughed, "I have to go back to… healing Crocile."

Reala left the premise and flew around the courtyard of the castle. Rachael was a failed 1st level, and did not have a lair of her own to reside in. Instead, she usually crept around Nightmayr's own. She was given a form by Nightmayr after all, he is her Wizeman, Reala thought.

Rachael was scrapped before Wizeman could fully finish creating her. It's unknown what *exactly* went wrong in her creation. All that was made of her was the crowned gem that now resides on her head. Nightmayr found it trashed with several other of Wizeman's belongings after his own destruction, and created a form and name for her to become his own loyal servant, clearly not trusting the old nightmaren enough. He was right in that thinking. They all hated him. Unfortunately for him, she hated him too.

"Rachael," Reala flew down to greet the nightmaren, "Nightmayr has ordered us to scope out an object from the Visitor. Lord Wizeman knows why."

"Eugh, do I really have to go? I can't stand that Visitor anymore. Last time I went to 'scope her out' I got a headache in her weird Nightopia." She whined, placing a hand on her cheek.

"Nightmayr has ordered us, so yes. Who knows- if we're lucky we may even run into the newly rebelled Nightmaren. With two of us it'll be a lot easier to get rid of it." Reala crossed his arms. He was trying to think of a way to convince Rachael to go.

Rachael smiled, "Guess you're right. Right behind 'ya."

Reala nodded and followed through his own paraloop into Nightopia. He cautiously flew inside it followed by Rachael.

"I swear if I see that girl I'll rip her head right off her body for making a fool out of me before!" Rachael growled.

"Nightmayr doesn't want harm to come to her, Wizeman knows why," Reala groaned.

"What was the guy like anyway? All you other nightmaren seem to never shut up about him," Rachael whined.

"He was stronger, a better leader, and to be quite frankly was probably much smarter too." Reala mumbled out a short response.

Rachael laughed, "yeah Nightmayr's not the brightest ideya in the visitor."

"I don't even know where he came from," Reala stopped flying and clawed at his maskless face. "He just… showed up one day and became Wizeman's favorite! Then decides *he's* the new ruler?"

"Sounds like someone's jealous," Rachael sneered.

Reala grunted and continued flying as Rachael followed, heading through Lilac Valleyt.

"There's too many flowers," Rachael complained.

"What's wrong with that?"

"I hate flowers."

Reala sighed, "Of course you do."

A bunch of nightopians that had been picking bouquets sensed the nightmaren, and instinctively fled the area. Reala inspected the surface below for any sign of the Visitor.

"The Visitor and NiGHTS don't appear to be around anywhere! Not even that blasted bird." Reala cursed.

"They could be hiding around in that Dream Plaza," Rachael suggested, "If we go back to Nightmayr without anything tho we're done for sure."

"We'll just have to wait for them to show up," Reala glared at the other, "and *not* leave until we get that orb… *and* those traitors!"

Chapter 7

" *Helen, this place is a mess! What even happened in here? A tornado blew everything around?" Mrs. Cartwright was standing in the doorway to Helen's room, continuing her daily routine of scolding her daughter for not completing any of the chores she had lined up for her. Clothes cluttered the floor of the bedroom, books had been sloppily placed away on the bookshelf and random junk seemed to litter the corners of the room. Helen was currently turned over on her side on the bed facing away from her mother playing a game on her phone. She was obviously invested.*

" *Who cares, it's my room. Not like anyone comes up here anyway." Helen muttered without even sitting up to acknowledge her mother's entrance.*

" *If you still want to have your friends over for your 15th birthday next week they will be. I'm going shopping, you better have this room at least started by the time I get home." Her mom's eyes glazed over the violin that was laying on the floor out of its case. How could her daughter have gotten so careless? She walked over and picked it up, "You need to take better care of your things, Helen. This violin is important, you shouldn't leave it lying around."*

Helen sighed, continuing to play her smart phone app, "I was practicing earlier and forgot to put it away. Is that really such a big deal?"

" *Guess not." Her mom gently placed the violin back in its case, "remember, by the time I get home-"*

" *I know, I know." Helen grunted, turning on her other side away from her mom, who then left her daughter alone. She waited until she heard her mother's footsteps fade away and the front door slam shut before getting up and turning on her laptop. If she was going to clean, may as well have some company. She opened up skype and clicked on her conversation with her friend, Mary Anderson, and went to call with her. The phone rang a couple of times before Mary*

answered.

" Woah, nice color. Did you dye it?" Helen asked, noticing her friends new white hair, still pulled up in a top bun.

Mary, being her usual egotistical self, brushed her bangs back and blushed, "Yeah, it was my friends idea. He said I'd look good in it. And we match now, too."

" Oh, who's the lucky guy?" Helen winked, "You must be pretty into him to let him control your hair color like that."

" It's not like that!" Mary laughed, "He said it suits me better. Besides, I do feel rather confident with it. Anyway, what's up?"

Helen rolled her eyes, "Mom's been on my case about cleaning my room or else I can't have my party next week. Seriously, who does she think she is?"

" Uh… your mother? Anyway I got you, girl. If it's company you want it's company you got." She winked at the camera.

" I don't see why my mom doesn't just hire a cleaning lady like your family does. It's so annoying how my mom expects me to do ***everything.*** *I'm only 14, I need time to have fun too!" Helen pulled out a box from her closet and started throwing things on her floor into it.*

" Eh, it's not that great. I get uncomfortable with the idea of someone I don't know rummaging around my room. Like, that's personal stuff y'know? It's enough my dad sneaks in here while I'm at school to go through all my things. Jesus, you'd think he thinks I'm hiding drugs in here or something."

" Well….aren't you?" Helen joked.

Mary just laughed in response. "So anyway, big 15 next week huh? That's going to be fun."

" Yeah," Helen replied, picking up the clothes on her floor and dumping them into the hamper, not even bothering to check if they were clean or not, "I still wish you could come."

" *Hey what can I say, life's an ass. You'll have fun even without me."*

Helen laughed, and took out another basket from her closet, "Jeez, I really need to actually go through some stuff in here. This crap's like… ancient."

" *Go through it now, I wanna see some embarrassing Helen stuff from the good ol' days." Mary inched closer to her webcam, clearly intrigued.*

Helen took the basket and dumped it out on her floor. Most of it was old pictures and music sheets which had been so filled up with doodles you couldn't read the score anymore, but one thing did catch Helen's eye. It was an old diary of hers, the front labeled, "Helen's Dream Diary".

" *Oh god," Helen laughed, "I found my old dream diary."*

" ***This*** *is gonna be good, read me some!"*

" *I don't know," she flipped through the pages, some had little stick figure drawings on them to go with the dream. "I had such a big imagination when I was a kid, wow."*

" *Come on, I'm falling asleep over here! Read me something!" Mary snapped, in a demanding tone.*

" *Alright, alright! Uh, here's one. It's just titled 'Aqua Garden'..." Helen opened up to a random page and began to read the diary entry out loud, pronouncing half of the words she didn't understand incorrectly. Which… there were a lot of. The entry was apparently about her and this friend called 'NiGHTS' going to explore some underwater place. She didn't understand what half of it meant, but it probably made sense to her 12 year old self at the time. "I actually kind of remember this, I wrote about me and NiGHTS playing together all the time… I guess he was kind of like an imaginary friend."*

" *Some 'imaginary friend'. You* ***talked*** *about him all the time." Mary laughed. Her eyes shifted to focus off the camera for a moment before returning back to Helen.*

Helen closed the diary and threw it on her bed, "I'll read it later, maybe I'll ask my mom if she even remembers it, too."

Helen continued to clean through her room and chat with Mary the rest of the day. They made a plan to meet up in town tomorrow; Mary promised to buy her a birthday gift still since she couldn't make it to her party. When Helen heard her mom return home she turned off her laptop, and threw it on her bed before doing the same with herself.

" *I'm home, how does chicken for dinner sound tonight?" Her mom barged in and began looking around her room, "Wow, look at you! I knew you could do it, don't you feel better now that your room is cleaned?"*

Helen shrugged, "I guess."

Her mom just rolled her eyes, "Dinner will be ready in about an hour, I'll come get you when it's done."

" *Sounds good," Helen replied as her mom closed her door. She went to grab her phone to finish up that level of r game he she started earlier in the morning, but her hand gravitated towards her old dream diary. She sighed and picked it up, made herself comfortable and opened up to the first page titled 'Encounter'.*

Helen sat down at the dinner table, still engaged in reading her old stories. Her mother had called her name several times to get her daughter's attention, but Helen was too zoned into the diary hear.

" *Helen!" Her mom finally slammed her hands down on the table. Helen jumped in her seat and finally looked up at her frowning mom. "I've called your name at least 10 times, what is with you tonight?" She noticed the dream diary in Helen's hands and began chuckling, "Oh, that's what it is. Never thought I'd see that thing again. Did you find it while you were cleaning?"*

Helen nodded, "Yeah, I've been reading it all afternoon. Do you remember anything about these stories?"

" *I remember you used to talk forever about them. You went*

into...major details about these stories. I wasn't that concerned, since every kid needs imaginary friends now and then...although you were a little past that age. What about you?"

" *Dunno. It's all kind of weird. I don't really remember thinking of this at all… it just kind of happened…"*

" *Most teenagers don't remember how their childhood imaginary friends came into existence," Helen's mom laughed, "which is why it can be so fun to talk about. You used to come running downstairs every morning going on about what you and that Night friend did last night."*

Helen laughed, "I don't remember that at all. Were you even a little bit freaked out?"

Her mom pulled out a seat at the table and sat down next to her daughter, "I mean, a little bit. I wondered if there was anything going on in your life to have you create such fantasies. That was just the inner mother in me I guess. You seemed a lot happier during it, though. It was nice to see you get so excited over something. You used to draw you and your dream friend together all the time, I used to put them on the fridge. You got embarrassed when I did that. Do you really not remember this? It was only a couple years ago"

" *Not really...I do remember having these fantasies… but I don't remember the fantasies themselves. It's really vague in my thoughts." Helen shook her head, "It's weird… anyway I'm getting hungry."*

" *You can go ahead and fix your plate," her mom said, standing up, "You may not be old enough to let go of imaginary friends but you're old enough to get your own food," she joked.*

Helen laughed back and followed her mom into the kitchen. It was only a few years ago… she thought to herself. It feels like it's been forever.

It was Monday morning, Maria knew that, or at least the groggy

feeling of staying up too late on a Sunday night knew that. Her alarm was buzzing her to get up but she didn't want to move. She hasn't had a decent sleep in ages, would 5 minutes really do any harm? Maria tiredly lifted her hand to slam her alarm off. It's not like she had to get up for school anything, she already graduated high school and was home for the time being. But, she got up anyway. Mostly out of habit, and also to see if Will needed a ride to school, which he usually didn't. It was an excuse to not be sleeping in bed until noon, though.

Maria got out of bed and threw on a random T-shirt that was lying on her floor for who knows how long. She brushed her hair, pulling it up into a ponytail and made herself look at least somewhat presentable.

Will was already downstairs eating, but she could tell he was still half asleep. She

walked over to him and lightly hit him on the shoulder to wake him up. He jumped in his seat in response and glared at Maria. "Ok, ok. I'm awake now."

Maria laughed, "Sorry, falling asleep in your breakfast has been a habit lately." She looked down at the table and noticed just a small cup of yogurt, "that's all you're having for breakfast?"

Will shrugged, obviously annoyed by his sister's remark. "I'm not that hungry, it's just breakfast," he muttered.

"The *most important* meal of day," She joked, "anyway, it looks like it's going to rain this morning. Need me to drive you to school?"

"I guess," Will muttered again.

Maria left and walked into the kitchen to make breakfast for herself. She turned the stove

on and took a couple of eggs out of the fridge. She wasn't really a fan of breakfast foods, but she knew she'd regret not eating. She finished making her eggs and sat down at the table. Will had already gone upstairs to change for school, so she was sitting alone.

It was always quiet in the mornings, and maybe that's another reason she liked it so much. Getting up at 5am to see the sunrise and updating her blog before anyone else is awake is always special. She couldn't wait to move out and live in her own flat.

There was a knock at the door, and Maria wondered who would be here this early in the morning. She slowly opened the door, and on her front porch were three kids, each wearing a different bright colored costume mask; a lion, a penguin and a mouse.

"Trick or treat!" They all shouted in unison.

Maria laughed, feeling a little uncomfortable "It's a little early for trick or treating isn't it? Are you guys friends of Will's or something?"

The three looked at each other and smiled, and looked right back at Maria who now had a confused and nervous expression as the early celebrators didn't respond.

Will had already put his uniform on and was on his way out of his room to leave when he heard a scream from downstairs.

"Maria?" he called after pausing for a moment. There was no response. "Maria?!" he called louder. Still no response. Will slowly walked downstairs and peered around the corner into the kitchen. He could hear the front door creaking, being blown open and closed by the wind and drawing his attention in that direction. Peeking around to the front he saw Maria lying on the ground.

Will ran over to her in panic. Nothing seemed to be wrong with her, there wasn't any injuries and she was also breathing calmly. She was… asleep?

He ran out of the open door and looked around the yard. There wasn't anyone around, no one was even walking down the street. Will was about to turn back and return inside when something on the lawn caught his eye. He cautiously walked over to the unknown object and retrieved it. It was an animal mask, one of a lion, the same as the ones the nightmare kids at the party were wearing.

When Will returned inside he moved Maria onto the sofa and went to

grab his bag, stuffing the mask inside it. It was still a while before he had to leave for school, but he had to go see Juliet as soon as possible. He was prepared to have to wait in front of the school for Juliet to arrive, figuring she would come when all the other kids did. To his surprise, Juliet was already about to walk through the front door of the school at the same time he arrived there. Will ran, shouting her name before she could step through the entrance.

"What? What is it?" Juliet asked turning around, "can it wait until study hall? I have to go and see my fr-"

"No! I mean… sorry. I didn't mean to yell," he held the side of his head, "look, something weird happened this morning. Something happened to my sister, I think your whole situation has something to do with it."

Juliet was perplexed at what this could possibly have to do with her, "what happened exactly?"

"Well, Maria came downstairs and everything was normal, right? So, I left to go upstairs and all the sudden I heard a scream."

"Was it her?"

Will shrugged nervously, "Sounded like her, I don't know. She never screams but who else could it have been. Anyway, I went downstairs and I found her on the ground asleep with the front door wide open. She wasn't… hurt at least that I know of but she just won't wake up."

"That's a little weird. This hasn't happened... before?"

Will shook his head, "No, can't say my sister just randomly falls unconscious often."

Juliet rolled her eyes and smiled at the snarky reply, "Well, why do you think this has something to do with Nightopia?"

As if he was waiting for her to ask that, Will dropped his bag on the ground and pulled out the lion mask, looking up at Juliet with a serious expression, "because I found this my lawn."

Juliet flinched, "That's what Marcus was wearing at the party!"

Will nodded, "I don't know what in the world they'd want with my sister… maybe they overheard me and you and think we're involved but… since I can't go to Nightopia maybe you can find her?"

"You think she's in Nightopia? Why?"

"It's… it's just a feeling. I don't know why but they wouldn't just make someone fall asleep like that, especially if they thought she was already involved. I don't know… I don't know what to do. I guess, you're the only one that can figure this out right now," he sighed, Juliet could tell he was feeling useless to the situation.

"I think I understand… kinda. NiGHTS and I will find her if she really is with those guys. It'll be in and out, okay?" Juliet tried to reassure him.

"Thanks… and sorry for causing more problems for you. I know this dream stuff isn't exactly easy," Will laughed awkwardly trying to lighten the mood. "You can go and see your friend now. I might not be in study hall today, also. It might be better if we aren't seen together for a while."

Juliet nodded in return, a little upset, and ran inside the school . The hallways were still fairly empty, but she knew students have already begun to swarm the building. Alaia was standing by her locker, she had clearly been waiting for a long time.

"Oh… hey. Sorry you had to wait," she quietly greeted.

"You said you usually got here around 8," Alaia responded nervously, "you're not avoiding me are you? I know things got a bit awkward but…"

"No!" She quickly jumped in, "Something just came up and my schedule got thrown off a bit. So uh… what did you want to talk about?"

"Well I stopped by the cafe yesterday to see… what was her name? The waitress there. Anyway, she said she got the OK to sing one of the weeks in November. I can't make it but… I figured I'd let you

know. Maybe you and those other friends of yours wanna go."

Juliet closed her locker and frowned. She wasn't sure if Alaia was lying or not. Maybe them not hanging out was for the best, if something happened to Will just because they were together, something could happen to Alaia too. Who knows who could be listening in on every conversation she has? "Thanks for letting me know. I promised her I'd go see since it is technically my fault… I got a little carried away with helping there didn't I?"

Alaia smiled, "Yeah, you've become quite the preacher lately. It's not really like you to be this positive and open but… it's not a bad change."

Not a bad change… Juliet thought.

The start of the day went by terribly slow. Most teachers were easy on the work, though. A lot of the classes were spent goofing around or talking about what everyone did over the weekend. It was hard to talk about what she did over the weekend, considering most of it was spent asleep.

Will didn't show up to study hall like he said, and Juliet was getting a little worried. He really freaked out this morning. Hopefully she and NiGHTS could figure something out before things got even worse. Not having any work to do, Juliet began to zone out.

She imagined herself in Venturing Forest exploring like normal the previous nights. There weren't many Nightopians with her, but it was peaceful imagining herself back there. Juliet followed one of the paths through the woods until she reached a dead end.

A dead end? That doesn't make sense… these paths are supposed to go on forever… she thought. There was a rustling in the greenery in front of her, and out popped a large royal blue peacock. It shot its feathers up, and Juliet stared in fear of the piercing eyes that decorated them.

The bell signaling the end of the period snapped Juliet out of her daydreaming. It felt so real, she almost forgot she wasn't even actually sleeping in the first place. The peacock disappeared, and in

front of her once again sat her classmates. The classroom emptied out rather quickly except for Juliet, who sat there in confusion as her mind slowly adapted back to reality. Nothing was making any sense today.

The rest of the day was spent thinking of how she was going to approach NiGHTS about what happened. The last time she brought up Will and Helen NiGHTS freaked out. Maybe she shouldn't mention their names… but how would she explain what happened? Juliet couldn't lie to someone like NiGHTS. How would they even find someone in that place?

"Hey, Juliet!" NiGHTS flew down to greet his new friend excitedly as she entered the Dream Plaza for the night, "you're here early tonight! That gives us more time to explore Nightopia together!"

NiGHTS began flying in a figure-8 motion around Juliet- careful not to accidentally paraloop the girl. Juliet stayed silent, not exactly sure how to explain the situation to NiGHTS. He was rather happy to see her made obvious by his gleeful flying, it would hurt her to ruin his night like this. She shifted her weight a bit before finally cutting off the nightmarens joyous flight.

"A-actually, NiGHTS… something's come up…"

NiGHTS lowered himself, and hovered at the dreamers height, cocking his head to the side, "Huh? What is it, did you find out some more information?"

"Uh… well…" Juliet's voice trembled as she spoke, "did any other visitors stop by earlier?"

NiGHTS hovered in front of her with a confused expression on his face, then shook his head, "nope, you're the only one that's stopped by recently I'm afraid. What's up?"

"Well…" Juliet felt like she was frozen. How was she going to explain to NiGHTS what happened without making him freak out again? "A friend I hang out with at school has a sister… and she fell asleep out of nowhere and won't wake up."

NiGHTS nodded, still with a confused look but trying to puzzle together what Juliet was trying to explain, "you think it has something to do with Nightopia?"

Juliet shook her head in response, "no, I'm almost positive it does. Remember those nightmare kids from that party I went to? That night they were all wearing these decorative costume masks. My friend… found one outside after what happened earlier."

"So these nightmare kids did something to make your friends sister fall asleep? But why would they do that?"

"That… I don't know. We think- *I* think," Juliet quickly corrected, "that they might think people I've been hanging out with are involved maybe… but I've never even met this girl before so that doesn't really make sense."

"I don't know why she would be in the Night Dimension, though," NiGHTS tried to rationalize the situation, "but the whole idea of these kids dreaming in nightmare has me worried. This could be how they recruit people."

"They have recruited someone from my town already… I think we need to go and check nightmare out!"

The floating nightmaren put his hands on his hips and glanced away from the visitor for a moment. "Alright," he sighed, "give me the details. Who are we looking for, exactly?"

"Uh… well… like I said I don't actually *know* her. I don't know what she looks like or anything…" Juliet got quiet. She didn't think she'd really get this far with NiGHTS.

"Well that's helpful. You don't know *anything* ?"

"All I know is she won't wake up and these other dreamers are behind it and Will's a little freaked out abou-"

Juliet stopped herself stared up at NiGHTS, both with the same frozen shocked expression.

"I-I mean my frie-"

"They do remember," NiGHTS frowned , obviously assuming before already.

"So you *do* know him…" she caught NiGHTS in his lie.

"Oh..! I don't." NiGHTS perked up, crossing his arms and glanced away once again, "never met either of them once. Why are you still asking me about them?"

"I...I'm not, and I never mentioned a 'them'..."

NiGHTS looked back at Juliet regretfully, he could see the genuine concern in her eyes. He knew he had to come forth with the truth now.

"Helen and Will…" NiGHTS heaved a sigh, and begrudgingly began explaining, "used to visit Nightopia all the time. They helped me save it once, actually… they were my closest friends at the time, and I didn't want to mess up again with them…" He crossed his legs in the air and leaned over.

"NiGHTS… we all make mistakes, it's part of learning, right? If you keep running from things… they'll never get better…" Juliet frowned.

"You don't get it!" NiGHTS shouted painfully, "I stole their Ideya! I became a nightmaren again… I hurt them! *My friends* ! I thought that I had left that behind me. But I don't know if I'll ever be able to escape my nightmaren instincts..." NiGHTS paused in shock, staring at the girl before him. For some reason everything he was holding inside of him began spilling out to this visitor he had only known for a few weeks.

"But you never meant it! I can tell, NiGHTS! If you don't try to fix th-"

"I just hurt everyone… they've all seen me for what I really was. Claris' face that one night… Will and Helen the other… it just never ended."

Juliet straightened her posture, and looked up at NiGHTS with a serious expression on her face, "I don't believe that. NiGHTS, ever since I met you I've been so much happier! I feel… more confident now! Because of you I realized that change isn't necessarily a bad

thing, and it happens all the time! We can't give up now! If you want to step down, I understand. I'll just do this myself, I don't really have a choice since it's following me everywhere. But I know you're not a bad person, and maybe there's a reason for your actions in the past because of that. You wouldn't even hurt a nightopian."

"I'm sorry, Juliet." NiGHTS sighed, "I guess… not understanding what happened with me in the past has been building up, I didn't mean to spill so much out on onto you."

"It's ok. You've helped me, it's only natural that I help you too!"

"Careful, you might put me out of a job," NiGHTS chuckled.

Juliet's expression lit up, "So that means you'll help, and see your friends again?"

"Well… the thing is… it's been a long time and I don't really know how to fix things at this point," the nightmaren shut his eyes.

"If it's you, NiGHTS, I don't think *anyone* would mind." She smiled.

NiGHTS grunted and spun around away from Juliet. He cupped his hands around his mouth and began shouting for Jolten.

"Hey, hey!" Jolten screamed, jumping out from some bushes nearby, "not so loud, okay! What in the world do you even *want* ? Thought I wasn't allowed near you guys!"

"Well that rule certainly didn't stop you from eavesdropping over there, did it?" The purple nightmaren crossed his arms and stared at Jolten.

"I was *nappin'* pal. Not *everyone* cares about what boring conversations a traitor must have with a visitor."

"Jolten, if I recall… aren't you a traitor too?" Juliet frowned, not wanting a fight to start.

"Hey!" they snapped, "I ain't no traitor! I'd never betray Wizeman like this annoying scrap right here! Nightmayr's different, he's *no* Wizeman that's for sure."

"Oh, right. Sorry." Juliet backed away from Jolten, who had sparks flying from their clenched fists.

"Listen, Jolten. I need you to do a favor. You know Nightmare better than anyone right now, and I have something I need to do." NiGHTS tried to sound as calm as possible. He still didn't trust Jolten, and if they decided they were going to pull anything, NiGHTS would be there. "Sneak Juliet with you to wherever Nightmayr is residing. If you get caught, say you captured her so you won't get hurt… I know what they do to traitors and you're still a newbie at this. Juliet, don't worry if something happens. I'll be there as fast as I can. I promise." NiGHTS smiled at his friend and crouched down to eye level.

Juliet gave a joking skeptical look, "Pinky promise?"

The nightmaren blinked a few times before giggling, and holding his pinky out in return, " *Pinky promise* ."

Jolten had led Juliet to the large cobblestone bridge that resided at the far edge of the plaza. She was hesitant at first when the nightmaren had explained to them the bridge connected right into Nightmare, but was assured the location of the Nightmare Plaza was empty, and has been for a long time, same as the Dream Plaza.

"It's where I hung around to get away from this mess, and how I managed to sneak over here," they explained, "but Nightmayr might have figured that out. We should still stay low and quiet in case any of his little pawns are around."

"Who exactly is this guy anyway?" Juliet finally let out the question she's been dying to ask since day one. Not even NiGHTS knew, and he was a Nightmaren, too.

"I don't know!" Jolten shouted angrily, "he just showed up one day and never left Wizeman's side. If you ask me, I think he's the one who actually made Wizeman kick the can. Then he decided that *he's* the new ruler or whatever. That he somehow can become more powerful than Wizeman."

"So he just showed up and started bossing you around? That's a little anticlimactic…"

"Just a little."

The rest of the way was pretty silent. The bridge was a lot longer than Juliet had anticipated it to be, in the end it made sense, though. After all, the dream world and the nightmare world shouldn't be neighbors anyway.

"Hey… wait." Juliet stopped walking, and glanced behind her in the direction of the Dream Plaza.

Jolten grumbled a 'what' in response. Being this close to Nightmare, they *really* didn't want to stop.

"Why didn't we fly across?" She looked up at Jolten, who's eyes went wide as they crossed their arms.

"What do you mean? *You* can't fly, idiot."

"I mean… together? Like when NiGHTS and I… what did he call it? Dualize? Why didn't we just do that?"

Jolten let out an annoyed sigh. They knew the girl was just curious and concerned, she had a right to be. But he hated being compared to NiGHTS. "Because I don't cheat my powers? What do you want me to say?"

Juliet was taken back by the nightmarens snappy response, "I… I don't…"

"Look, kid," Jolten sighed, annoyed at both them and the visitor, "I actually can't dualize. I can't paraloop. I can't form bombs outta the sky. All I can do is make flashing lights and loud noises. Sorry I'm not as cool as NiGHTS or Reala or any other super cool powerful Nightmarens you may know." Their voice got quieter as they talked, even choking up a bit. They dropped their arms to their sides frustratingly, and continued to fly towards Nightmare, Juliet frantically jogging behind them.

"Well I mean, that's still pretty cool! I saw you forming lightning in your hand earlier. If you ask me, that's way cooler than making some dumb doom portal." Juliet ran behind Jolten grinning, mostly just trying to get on his good side. Jolten never responded, but Juliet

was sure she saw him smile a little bit.

Now it was really silent. Juliet didn't understand why Jolten was so sensitive over that question. Well, she did. But to her it wasn't anything to get defensive about. She wished Jolten could understand but… it was best to just stay quiet until they arrived at the other side of the bridge. She didn't want to make him any more angry, as he *was* her tour guide for the evening.

The Nightmare Plaza was, just as Juliet has expected, dark. It looked like your stereotypical abandoned graveyard, like it came straight out of some gritty low budget Halloween movie. Tall dark green plants of unknown species broke through the cobblestone of the walkway, and tall black gothic fences surrounded the entire plaza like a prison. It was no wonder this place died long before the Dream Plaza. What visitor in their right mind would *choose* to come here?

Jolten had already taken the lead by about 10 feet, clearly not wanting to stay and bird watch. Juliet quickly jogged up to the nightmaren, confused as to where they were going to go from here. Nothing really made sense in the Night Dimension. Worlds and Realms were all over the place, there was never a set entrance or exit to anywhere. It was just one big changing maze.

The two walked along paths and into portals for what seemed like centuries, and Juliet was beginning to think this was just a lost cause. *There's no shame in calling a quits…* she thought.

"There," Jolten stopped very abruptly, pointing to a big cloud of fog in the distance.

Juliet squinted and stared at the fog for a while, but shook her head, "You mean Nightmayr just chills in a big pool of fog?"

"No you dunce," they spat, "we're in his lair. His main hub is down through the fog. The guys a lunatic I know, but trust me. It's there. My work here is done," the yellow nightmaren turned around and began to fly away from the dreamer, who called their name in immediate response.

"What do you think you're doing? I can't just go *alone!* "

"Look kid, you're nice and all. But my promise was to take you here, not walk right into it with you. This is where I head back to my safe spot, and you be a clueless little visitor and walk right into what's obviously a trap. Frankly, I don't want to stick around here one bit."

"Well…" Juliet stuttered a bit, "Can you at least just… wait here with me? Until NiGHTS gets here?"

"No way, Jose! The longer I stick around the more of a chance that lunatic'll find me and destroy me for being the only nightmaren with enough guts to cross him."

Jolten managed to fly away a few more feet, until a second call of their name from Juliet made them cease once again.

"You know…" Juliet grinned, "If NiGHTS finds out you left me here alone… I doubt he'd let you even have one *foot* in the Dream Plaza. He'll kick you out before you can even *say* Nightmayr."

"Eugh…" Jolten let out a defeated groan. They did a 180 back towards Juliet, and returned to their spot right next to her. "I don't want any small talk, though. Let's just sit here and wait for that purple lump to get here, if he even knows *how.* I don't think he's stepped foot in nightmare for decades . "

"I'm sure he'll find a way, he's NiGHTS!" She smiled, but Jolten just looked away and remained silent.

Juliet sat down on the edge of the cliff before the pool of fog. She pulled her knees into her chest and continued to stare down at the swirling clouds in the distance. You'd think she'd be used to all this by now, but it was still so surreal to her.

Her train of thought was interrupted by the sound of footsteps shuffling behind her. She turned around to see Helen running towards her eagerly.

Juliet stood up to run and meet her halfway, thankful to see each other. She glanced over Helen's shoulder a bit confused though. "Where's NiGHTS and Will?"

"They're…" she glanced behind her, "...somewhere. I ran ahead of them a while ago… against NiGHTS' wishes." Helen laughed, blushing a little, "I guess I just got excited being here again. Well, not *here* . It's creepy here."

Juliet let out a small laugh, "Well it's nice you got here so fast, I was getting lonely."

Jolten grunted, "You act as if I haven't been here the whole time."

"It's not like you were that great of a company in the first place…" Juliet mumbled, surprised Jolten was still even here.

"Who's that?" Helen asked.

"Oh… that's Jolten," Juliet assumed she was referring to the nightmaren, "I… really don't know that much. I *think* they're on our side?"

"That's reassuring." Helen nervously smiled.

Jolten groaned again and began swerving around impatiently. Juliet could tell they felt heavily unsafe being here, and she didn't blame them for not wanting to be here. *She* didn't even want to be here.

She and Helen both peered back down at the abyss below them. Juliet wondered how big this place would even be, and how they would ever even *begin* to look for Maria. Her tenseness must have been noticed by Helen, who gently placed her hand on Juliet's shoulder and assured her it would be okay.

"We're all in this together now, right?" She smiled.

"Hey! Juliet!" NiGHTS called cheerily from the distance.

"NiGHTS!" She turned around to greet her friend as he approached her. Will was right behind him, jogging to keep up.

"Looks like everyone's here," NiGHTS smiled. Juliet could sense the hint of nervousness behind it, though. NiGHTS had every right to feel uncomfortable right now, but she hoped he would eventually get over it and move on. The two made eye contact, and Juliet gave him

a reassuring smile and was returned with a nod from the nightmaren.

"Well, this is where I take my leave," Jolten turned to fly away but NiGHTS had gripped their sleeve, pulling them back down.

"Jolten, would you mind just… waiting here? Incase anything happens?" NiGHTS said quietly to the other. He stated it as a question, but it was obvious Jolten would have no say in the matter. Jolten begrudgingly agreed to stay and wait, and Juliet wondered if they could trust them not to fly off while they were gone.

NiGHTS turned to face the three dreamers and held his hands out to them, "the only way we're getting through that is by flying. It's… been awhile since I've done this, I don't know how much power it's going to take but… I think there's enough Ideya with the three of you here to do it."

Helen and Will glanced over at each other and nodded, like they clearly understood what NiGHTS was referring to. Juliet on the other hand was absolutely clueless. She assumed they were dualizing due to having to fly but how do all three of them do that? The rest had already touched each others hands with one another, and waited for Juliet to do the same.

She held her breath and gently touched finger tips with NiGHTS and Helen. The familiar feeling of dualizing had struck her immediately as the bright light absorbed the foursome. When Juliet's vision fixated, two other NiGHTS were floating in front of her, also adjusting to the strange sensation.

"How's this for a surprise, Jules?" All three NiGHTS asked at once, causing Juliet to flinch a bit.

"I didn't know you could dualize with more than one person! NiGHTS, that's amazing!" The visitor beamed.

"It's not something he can do often," Helen explained, "it takes a lot of strength to do it. There's only been one time we've had to do it."

"I usually only do it when it's extremely necessary," NiGHTS had

added, "just now… it seems to be the easiest way to all get down there together without a pile of visitors grabbing on my back. We also don't know how many nightmaren are waiting down there."

Juliet flew towards the abyss, and anxiously glanced down again. Now they were actually going to do it… go down there. It felt strange, and like this was it, but she knew this was only the beginning to whatever is going on in the Dream World.

"Jeez, how far down do you think it is?" Both other NiGHTS flew next to Juliet and peered down as well.

"Only one way to find out," Will grinned, and took off the ground. "Race you two to the bottom!"

Helen grunted in annoyance and raced down too right behind him. Both had already disappeared into the fog.

Juliet turned around to see Jolten one last time. They smiled in defeat and gave the girl a thumbs up. Smiling, she returned the good luck, and started to fly down into the unknown.

Chapter 8

Helen hopped out of her mom's car and ran up to Mary who was waiting for her on the sidewalk. She was wearing bright, red heels that immediately caught Helen's eye as she went to greet her friend. The heels couldn't be less than 4 inches; Helen wondered how she was even standing without wobbling around. She turned around and waved goodbye to her mom as she drove away.

"Still getting rides from your mum?" Mary chuckled.

"It's not like I can drive yet!" Helen protested to her friend, but in a joking tone, "and neither can you."

"I took a taxi," Mary started fumbling around her bag for some black lipstick and went to reapply her already darkened lips, "I'd never trust my dad to drive me anywhere."

Helen stared at Mary as she applied the lipstick with a questioning look on her face, "Black lipstick? That's new."

Mary threw the makeup back into her bag and smiled as she smacked her lips together for a finishing touch, "I like it."

The two began walking down the street, glancing through store windows but never actually heading inside of one yet. Nothing really caught Helen's eye, and the stores around here were all clothing stores for like… old people. The only time they stopped inside one of the stores was to warm up for a moment. It was February after all, and Bellbridge could get quite cold during the winter.

A bright light had bounced into Helen's eye nearly blinding her for a moment. She looked around to see a a little silver ring that glistened as the suns rays hit it. It was sitting in a little store window- a Jewelry shop she usually dismissed on her afternoons in town. Something about the ring was different, though, and Helen couldn't seem to take her eyes off of it.

"You like that?" Mary responded. Helen didn't even hear her walk

up.

"A little bit. I don't have a ton of jewelry, it's always too flashy. But if you're trying some new things then I want to too!"

Mary looked down at the ring that had caught Helen's attention so much, "This one's not that flashy. I can get you something bigger. Like with a diamond or something?"

Helen shook her head, "I kinda like this one."

"Alright princess," Mary winked, "I'll be right back."

Helen was told to wait outside while Mary went into the shop to purchase the ring on the display in the window. She could see the store employee hesitate for a moment before retrieving the ring and selling it to his new customer.

She wasn't sure why she wanted it so bad. There were definitely other things she could want around town, even a simple coffee would be a nice enough present. But for some reason, she was eagerly awaiting Mary to return outside with her new ring.

"Here you go my lady," Mary laughed as she presented Helen with the tiny box containing her present within. "Put it on! I wanna see it how it looks on you!"

Helen fumbled around with the new ring on her finger. It was weird for her; never being a big jewelry person, but it gave her a new level of confidence she didn't know she even had. Is this how Mary feels now?

She looked up and saw Mary heading towards the cafe up ahead already, she wasn't that hungry but could definitely go for some coffee, or even just some hot chocolate now that she was thinking of it before. Thankfully, the line wasn't too long. Most people aren't out walking around town on a cold February afternoon.

Helen got a small cup of coffee to warm and perk her up, but Mary insisted on tea. She seemed almost snobby about it. Then again, she was never a huge fan of anything bitter.

Mary wanted to stop at the convenience store before they parted ways to run a few errands of her own instead of sitting down at the cafe. Although she lived with her parents, she still lived very independently. She cooked her own dinner, did her own laundry, bought her own food…

As the duo walked out of the cafe and turned the corner, Helen's phone buzzed. Figuring it was her mom asking about how much longer they'd be out, she took it out and looked down to see the message and answer. As she was about to send her reply, Helen rammed into another person on the sidewalk and spilled her hot coffee everywhere.

She looked up instantly with regret, seeing a couple of boys standing outside the cafe, one now wearing her beverage all over his jacket. One of the boys standing next to him had dark hair, and Helen recognized the red shirt under his jacket as the jersey for the towns major youths football team. He was glaring at her.

"Watch where you're going blondie," he scoffed, taking a sip of his own hot drink.

The boy Helen bumped into turned around to his friend embarrassed, "It's fine, dude. Neither of us were really paying attention."

"The bitch was clearly on her phone. Obviously whatever trends on twitter are more important than the safety of others," the other responded, never turning his focus away from Helen.

"No one even got hurt but… yeah," the boy turned back to Helen, "You really should've been looking where you were going."

"Yeah… sorry…" Helen bent over to pick up her now empty cup of coffee she dropped. She didn't even get to drink any yet.

"Is there a problem here?" Mary stepped beside her friend and crossed her arms, staring sternly at the dark haired boy.

He looked taken aback for a moment before standing his ground again, "Yeah there is. We're out here freezing our asses off in the

freezing cold, minding our own business when your friend was too stupid to not stay in her lane."

"Oh grow up," Helen grunted, now finally getting sick of the boys attitude,"my phone buzzed and I just checked to see who it was quickly. It's your fault for acting like you own the sidewalk."

The one boy shrugged slightly, but in return received a mean look from his friend before quickly turning back to Helen almost in fear, "But you seriously couldn't wait three seconds to look? I'm going to smell like coffee all day because you can't go three seconds without looking at your phone?"

"You could've stopped walking at least…" A third boy chimed in. He looked like he didn't really want to get involved.

"That jacket's hideous anyway," Mary smirked, "she did you a favor. Bright blue isn't really your color."

"It's my sister's…" he mumbled quietly.

"It's what?" Mary leaned in mockingly.

"It's my sister's."

The dark haired boy burst out laughing, "Really 'Taylor? You wear your sisters clothes? What else do you two borrow? Lotion? I thought you smelled a little fruity today!"

"My jacket was in the wash and it's cold out, shut up Jake!"

"Look, there's no need for this," Helen pleaded, both at the boys and to Mary, "I said I'm sorry. What do you want?"

Jake slowly pulled out his phone and studied Helen for a moment before smirking, "I know exactly what I want." He lifted the lid off of his own cup of coffee and walked over to Helen, dumping it right on her head. "Aw look you two match now! I hear lovebirds chirping."

The coffee was hot; it felt like it was burning off her skin but Helen tried to remain calm. Mary went to step forward but Helen grabbed her arm, she knew how Mary has been lately and didn't want her

escalating things even more. It was just boys being boys.

Helen turned around and dragged Mary away. They were headed in the opposite direction of the convenience store, but she didn't really care. She just wanted to get home and take a shower.

"Seriously, what's up with girls? All they care about is phones and coffee, and have no respect for us guys anymore." Helen overheard Jake complaining from behind them loudly, clearly making sure she heard him.

"She's probably going to go whine to her mom and dad about this horrible injustice," the third boy forcibly laughed along.

"Whatever, she's gonna regret that." He laughed to himself and shoved his phone back in his pocket.

The quieter boy noticed Jake putting his phone back, "Let it go, dude. You took that a little too far don't you think?"

*"Shut up 'Knight don't act like the good guy here, you were enjoying it too don't lie." Jake rolled his eyes. "No one messes with me. Or-you guys either I guess. Sincerely, a hit to you guys is a hit to me. I'm **just** looking out for my guys, right?"*

The other two exchanged uncertain glances again before responding, "Right."

Juliet blinked her eyes open to see the somewhat familiar area in the Dream Plaza before her. Did Twylight… teleport them? She glanced over to see NiGHTS and Twylight in the distance having a conversation. NiGHTS was yelling about something, but she couldn't tell what they were saying, and she wasn't sure if it was because of distance or because of her head throbbing from the teleportation.

Twylight noticed Juliet walking over and smiled, ignoring NiGHTS' remarks, "Juliet, is it? Are you feeling okay?"

"Yeah..?" Juliet responded a bit confused, "we just teleported."

"We portalled here about 5 minutes ago," they grinned, "you passed out after we got here. You seemed pretty stressed out! Only for about a minute, though."

"So you can teleport? Can all nightmaren do that?" Juliet glanced over to NiGHTS.

"No, it's just my power, or well, one of them." Twylight grinned playfully.

"My paraloops are a bit different compared to these portals…" NiGHTS begrudgingly added in. "Paraloops are more...destructive."

"Can you teleport anywhere? Like to the Waking World? Is that how that Nightmaren attacked me at school?"

Twylight's face scrunched up in confusion, "Well, sure, but more importantly a nightmaren attacked you in the Waking World?" Twylight leaned back and began to scratch their chin with their claw-like fingers, "I've been dormant, so it's impossible otherwise. Nightmayr doesn't have those powers. They're mine… to an extent. Nightmayr has powers of his own but mine are more fun!"

"So what powers does *he* have?" NiGHTS demanded in question.

"Do you mind if we have this conversation later? Let me wake up a bit,"" Twylight rubbed their black lit eyes and yawned. They turned around and flew off giving a reassuring smile before NiGHTS could demand more information out of them.

NiGHTS felt guilty. So much was happening that he didn't know how to stop. All NiGHTS wanted to do is help people… it must hurt feeling so helpless, Juliet thought. He flew off in the direction Twylight had left without saying a word more to Juliet.

Juliet sighed as the two disappeared and decided to go over to Jolten to see how he was doing instead, figuring NiGHTS and Twylight would figure something out themselves. He was sitting on the steps to the entrance of the large castle that resided in the plaza. They looked tired and a bit grumpy, his face was resting on his hand, and his expression barely changed when Juliet walked up to

them.

"They're in there," they pointed to the entrance behind him, "the other two, I mean. I'm assuming that was what you wanted."

"Uh… yeah sure, thanks Jolten." Juliet grinned awkwardly and walked past the sulking nightmaren through the castle doors. Maybe now wasn't a good time to bother him.

The other two visitors were right in the first hall. Helen was pacing back and forth around Will, who was laying on the ground, his head supported up by his arms.

"I mean- we couldn't of right? You don't think we actually…"

"I don't know, Helen! Let's stop talking about it."

"I'm sorry it's just, with what happened and what's happening I can't help it! Oh… hey Juliet." Helen stopped pacing as she noticed Juliet awkwardly walking into the room, "Sorry I didn't notice you there… how long have you...?"

Juliet shrugged, "Is there something going on?"

Will laughed, "Helen thinks we were the ones who released Nightmayr."

"What do you mean *we* ? *You* were the one who kicked the stupid thing!"

"Yeah but *you* were supposed to *catch it* that's how the game works! Why did we even do that anyway?" He got defensive, clearly not wanting all the blame to be on him.

"Wait wait wait back up a second. Why do you think you released Nightmayr? You mean like how Twylight was released?"

"Well…" Helen started, "back at his lair….it first occurred to us when that orb rolled out of your bag… *This* castle, the Dream Plaza… we were here before," her voice cracked a bit, "a few years ago we both ended up here somehow. We found an orb similar to the one Twylight came out of-"

"The orb was somehow telling us NiGHTS locked it away so we broke it and freed whatever was inside it and it was probably Nightmayr.." Will quickly finished.

Helen glared at him.

"What! You take too long telling stories."

"What if it wasn't? Isn't there a third part of Fryght somewhere?"

"Exactly, which is why I said we should just let it go. Nothing could change what happened so we should focus on what's happening right now." Will agreed.

"Speaking of, how was… your sister right? Was she okay?" Juliet immediately took the chance to switch topics. Whether it was a good topic to switch to or not was up for debate.

Helen jumped in again, "she was in an unconscious state but we managed to get her to wake up… hopefully Will can convince her she was just 'dreaming' so to speak."

"Do you know what Nightmayr wanted?" Will's eyes narrowed up at Juliet, "I know he was after you before but... it didn't seem like he cared that much to see you tonight."

She groaned, almost as if she was embarrassed, "I'm just as confused as you guys are. It has something to do with that stone. Do either of you have it with you?"

Helen sighed "Twylight has it, where are they anyway?"

"They flew off somewhere, NiGHTS followed...I think. It's just us, and Jolten I guess…"

"Jolten? Is that the yellow one?" Will sat up, "what's his deal anyway?"

Juliet crossed her arms, "that's a good question. I guess he betrayed Nightmayr but he's still against us? I don't think they're that much of a threat, though."

Helen peered over to see Jolten staring bullets at them through the crack in the door. "I think he can hear us."

"He's supposed to," Will shouted towards the door with his hands cupped around his mouth.

"Anyway I have to find where NiGHTS went. I want to go back to where I found Twylight's orb in the Dream Gate..." Juliet explained.

Will groaned, "I thought we were dropping this topic."

"I never said you had to come," she laughed.

" *I'll* come," Helen stepped forward to offer, "I missed Nightopia, and any chance to see NiGHTS again I'll take."

"You sure you don't wanna come?" Juliet turned around and asked Will once more as she and Helen stood in the doorway.

"No thanks, I should be waking up soon to deal with Maria anyway," he shrugged, "you guys go on ahead."

Helen frowned a bit, but turned back to Juliet and walked out behind her.

Twylight had outflown NiGHTS, and now the nightmaren had no chance of talking to them alone again. Returning back to the Dream Plaza's main clearing, NiGHTS kicked the ground in anger. What was he even angry *about* anymore? Something about Twylight was bothering him. He couldn't help but to feel like he's met them before. Something about them was familiar… but that had to be impossible. He would've remembered running into another nightmaren wouldn't he? In any case, NiGHTS didn't trust them. If Fryght's story is true, nothing good could come from any of his shattered pieces. He was going to keep a close eye on Twylight.

His thoughts were interrupted by Juliet and Helen's voices calling behind him. Juliet looked extremely out of breath.

"NiGHTS!" Helen shouted, "We've been looking for you!"

"Oh? What's up?" The nightmaren flew down, crossing his legs and

sitting in the air like usual.

"I wanted to go back to the Dream Gate to check out where we found… well... found Twylight I guess." Juliet replied, trying to catch her breath still from running.

NiGHTS sighed, "Unfortunately that might be too dangerous, the place is probably in an even worse state now than it was before."

"Okay…" Juliet sounded disappointed, but quickly thought of another easy suggestion for the night. "Why don't we go check out Nightopia instead?"

"Sounds like fun!" NiGHTS beamed, "Helen are you going to come with us?"

"Sure!" she smiled back, "I'd love to!"

NiGHTS took the two visitors and flew off to the small clearing of the plaza where the entrances to Nightopia were. Helen wandered around in the clearing in awe, it looked almost like the Dream Gate but felt… cozier in a way. It was strange not having the fountain in the center to break the eerie silence, all there was… was a bird bath? Helen peered over to look into the small bath, and the same circle of light from Juliet before happened again. The frames for the doors were filled, replaced with three Nightopia's unfamiliar to Juliet. "What? NiGHTS where did Lilac Valley go?" Juliet looked up to her friend.

"The Dream Plaza was a place for visitors to interact with one another like a big dream gathering! So I guess this clearing here recognizes the visitor and changes the Nightopia accordingly now that Juliet's ideya has activated it."

"Right… visitors couldn't normally see each other in the Dream Gate… it was separate for each visitor's dream… that always confused me too I guess." Helen further tried to explain.

"So how do we get my Nightopia back?"

Helen waved Juliet over, "I think it has something to do with this bird bath thing. Does it sense ideya or something?" She looked over to

NiGHTS.

"Juliet try touching it," NiGHTS flew down, "see if we get a reaction."

Juliet grabbed the bath and pulled herself over to look into it like Helen did before. Again, the light returned and the three new doors were swapped out with Juliet's current as the stained glass imagery above them shifted. However something was different this time. A new door glittered brightly next to the door for Lilac Plains. The stained glass above depicted a dim green forest, the focal point of the picture appeared to be a suspended bridge.

"That wasn't there before!" Juliet identified the new entrance.

"Looks like a new Nightopia awaits you, Juliet!" Beamed NiGHTS once more. "Let's go already! I can feel some excitement right behind the door!"

Juliet clapped her hands together in excitement. A new Nightopia to explore! What surprises had in store for them there?

"You know what…" Helen leaned up against the bird bath, "I think I'll let you two go yourselves. Now that I know my Nightopias are still here… I want to spend some time there myself for a bit. I missed them..."

NiGHTS nodded, "Sounds good! Once I finish up with Juliet I'll come find you and we can play like old times! Maybe we can try to make an even bigger bubble in Aqua Garden!"

"That would be fun too!" Helen laughed.

"Alright, Julie!" NiGHTS looked down at Juliet, "it's just you and me!"

Helen waited until Juliet and NiGHTS were gone before triggering the doors to change once again. She stood staring at the three entrances to her Nightopias, not sure which one she wanted to visit again. Memory Forest reminded her of the last night she was here, and it made her feel upset. Neither she nor Will brought it up, and they both acted like they didn't remember, but she knew they would have to face it eventually.

She glanced around the clearing before stepping up to the door that led to Crystal Castle, feeling rather giddy before she entered.

"'Thought they'd all never leave," Rachael flew out from hiding behind, Reala grunting.

"I see NiGHTS brought back an old friend," Reala sneered, "not like that'll do him any good this time. I have another idea to tire NiGHTS out and get him to cooperate."

"Oh huh? What's that?" Rachael replied, they seemed uninterested in anything Reala was saying.

"Just follow me," he grunted in response.

The new door glittered, and Juliet could feel it beckoning for her to go inside. Each Nightopia she creates is a reflection of herself, her deepest desires. What would this one have in store for her? She stepped forward and pulled the large black doors open, and she felt herself falling into her new dream.

The new world was a large forest, with trees that looked as tall as skyscrapers. Several of the trees were hollowed out with small holes along the sides which she could see nightopians flying in and out of. Several paths winded around leading deep into the woods, with pretty colorful markers along the sides, like the ones you would follow if you had gotten lost while taking a hike. The scenery reminded Juliet of the woods her family would hike in when she was younger. Those family hikes were the start of her love for adventure and nature, and she had nearly forgotten until now.

"I love it!" Juliet clapped her hands together as she ran into the world. The smell of the forest hit her nose strongly bringing a strong sense of happy nostalgia.

"Me too! The forest has always been one of my favorites." He kicked up his feet to float in the air, "Quiet, endless, no room for Wizeman..."

"Well now, I suppose that's why I've always hated it." A cruel toned voice interrupted the peaceful reminiscence. A voice that felt like

needles on Juliet's back as she shuddered. NiGHTS quickly regained his posture and turned around in tune with the visitor to face the newcomer.

It was Reala. He had Helen tightly in his grip.

"Bravo, bravo! As suspected, you have uncovered a new Nightopia!"

"Let her go Reala! What do you want?" NiGHTS flew in front of Juliet, but was obviously feeling too tired from zipping around to fight again.

Something about Helen was giving Juliet a weird feeling, but she couldn't explain what it was. Instead, she decided to remain behind NiGHTS where she was safer.

"How about we have a trade? You have something Nightmayr wants, I have something you might want." He grinned, Helen simply remained silent. "I know you don't enjoy harm coming to your little visitor friends so just be a good boy and behave."

"What could he possibly want from us? If he wants his stupid stone back, we're not the ones who have it."

"What?" Reala had a confused expression on his face, "the orb! Nightmayr sent us to retrieve it from here."

NiGHTS and Juliet remained silent, and stared at Reala for a while before looking at each other and chuckling. Reala demanded to know what was so funny.

"Have you been hanging around here all night Reala? You missed the big party we had back at Nightmare!" NiGHTS joked in a chiding manner, "that orb we found here is long gone. Nightmayr knows it too."

Reala snarled, and tightened his grip on Helen, "explain yourselves! I can easily crush the visitor, NiGHTS!"

Juliet locked eyes with Helen and nearly jumped in her own spot. NiGHTS was about to react when Juliet leapt in front and cut him off, "go ahead!" She shouted. NiGHTS flinched and stared wide eyed at

Juliet, appalled at her actions. "That's not Helen, anyway!"

"You're a feisty visitor, aren't you? You pick them well, NiGHTS." He sneered.

"What? But-" NiGHTS looked over at Reala. He had an angry expression on his face. "That's not Helen?!"

"How are you so sure? Are you willing to take that bet?"

"Of course," Juliet crossed her arms, "Helen doesn't have pink eyes."

NiGHTS was taken aback, almost disappointed in himself for not realizing the difference. Was it so long he couldn't even remember what his own friend looked like?

The Helen growled and ripped away from Reala, transforming and revealing herself to be Rachael.

"Bravo, bravo. As suspected, your plan turned out to be useless and failed again!" NiGHTS laughed, mocking Reala.

"You certainly haven't won yet… or did you forget NiGHTS? A nightmaren always comes back for seconds. While we planned to have our fake dance here, another ball was commencing! You really think I would've let you have *any* prize?" Reala sneered, but before he could say any more a large portal opened up behind him and Rachael. Twylight flew out of it, grabbing the two and throwing them in behind their back. They poked the portal, causing it to close as soon as the two fell through.

"They won't be back. At least not for a while." Twylight smiled over at the two and began to laugh.

"It's ok but… NiGHTS? What was he talking about?" Juliet frantically ran to her friend.

NiGHTS flew silently for a moment, but his expression changed to shock as soon as he recalled, "Crocile!"

Twylight responded, already opening up another portal, "your friend

is in trouble. They sent Crocile for the other visitor to lower your numbers. When I saw I came to find you two as soon as possible."

"I should've figured Reala would try to do something sneaky like that, he *never* plays fair" NiGHTS pouted, "I just hope we're not too late."

"If we stand here and shame ourselves any longer it *will* be too late, come on." Twylight grunted as they began to shove NiGHTS through the portal. Juliet willingly followed through.

Will watched Juliet and Helen walk out of the castle back outside into the plaza, feeling a bit guilty for skipping out on them. What was he so nervous about?

Just as the door closed behind the two girls, it opened once more as Jolten flew in. Will stood uncomfortably as Jolten hovered a bit too close to him, smirking.

"You're not actually waking up yet, are you?"

Will groaned, "No. I mean…"

"You're a terrible liar you know? I could hear your hesitation that entire conversation. It was painful." Jolten crossed his legs and rested his head against his hand, "and you guys really talk like no one else is listenin'."

Will turned away from the nightmaren, a little annoyed, "I don't know… it'd just be weird."

"Weird? Because they're both girls?" they smirked.

"No!" Will turned back to Jolten defensively, turning red, "it's just… it's Helen!"

"Oh, what do you like her or something?"

He turned red and stiffened in frustration, "No!"

Jolten sighed and flew down, sitting on the ground again, quieting down a bit, "shouting just makes you look more guilty, you know.

Anyway, what is it then? You were all gettin' along fine before."

Will paused in confusion for a moment but decided to take a seat next to Jolten, "It's just… things are kinda weird between all of us. I know Helen thinks it too, but were both too nervous to say anything I guess. It's not healthy to just pretend like nothing happened between us and NiGHTS, you know?"

"Pretending like I know what you're talking about... nothin's gonna happen if you don't say anything. You two *are* friends, from what I've gathered in the past 30 minutes at least."

"That's the thing… I don't think we are. I don't know… we've ran into each other a few times before… I don't think she's particularly fond of me anymore. That's why I feel kinda weird about going along…"

"I mean, I don't think the purple guy is very fond of me either, we've had some bad run ins with each other but we've been able to put it behind us for the sake of getting through this together." Jolten shrugged, "I think you're just overthinking things. I do it a lot, you just gotta learn to get over it and move on."

Will looked up at Jolten, "You overthink things? What does a nightmaren have to stress out about anyway?"

Jolten frowned, "It doesn't really matter, it's not important to what's going on now."

"Come on," he moved in closer to the nightmaren, "I just shared with *you* ."

"Fine," Jolten groaned, "being around NiGHTS lately has also felt pretty weird for me too… I guess I just spent my entire existence being constantly compared to him, seen as lesser than him… every second of my life before was spent just trying to be better than him, being *me* . Showing Wizeman I could be worth something to him. So tagging along behind NiGHTS now like some *dog* just feels like a slap in the face. But… it's funny," Jolten laughed, "I don't actually miss him. Wizeman, I mean. Even though all my existence… he was all I ever really knew. Everything I did was for him. I feel… weirdly free… but I feel guilty about it."

"If you want *my* opinion, Wizeman's a jerk," Will grinned, "he probably didn't deserve you at all."

"I don't know why he kept me around. He only kept a handful of rejects around, but *they* all still had some kind of purpose, *they* were all their own nightmaren. I was just always… the lesser *NiGHTS* !"

"Maybe you were overthinking things again," Jolten looked at Will in uncertainty, "I mean, what if no one was actually comparing you to NiGHTS? What if that was all in your head?"

He perked his head up and laughed, "Well, that would mean I wasted centuries of my life and it's all been useless up until this point. Anyway!" Jolten stretched up and pulled Will up to his feet, "since you don't wanna wake up just yet, and NiGHTS and the Funky Bunch are all busy, how about we go kill some time together."

"I haven't seen any of my Nightopias since I was 13. Actually, I don't know how to get to them from here thinking about it."

Jolten gave a bow, similar to NiGHTS' own signature, "allow me to be your tour guide for the night. I'm experienced with this job, trust me. I have a resume."

"Lead the way, then!"

"Any particular Nightopia in mind?" Jolten glanced back and asked as the two headed outside.

"Well, you're pretty bright in color and loudly obnoxious. How about Delight City?"

Jolten mockingly replied with a 'ha ha' and went to pick the visitor up in his arms, "sorry about the bumpy ride but I can't dualize. I *am* quite fast, though."

"How fast?" Will grinned, trying to challenge Jolten in a way.

"Faster than that dumb purple clown *wishes* he could be!" With that statement Jolten burst off in a flash of light, arriving in front of the gate of dreams in just a few seconds. He dropped Will on the ground, who was wobbling around rather dizzy from the sudden take

off but soon regained balance.

Just up ahead was the path that lead to the small courtyard, containing the doors to Nightopia. Jolten caught a familiar appearance disappear behind one of them just as they arrived.

"Hey… that was…" He trailed off quietly, more confused than anything. Will just look up curiously at him. "A nightmaren just went through the door, Rachael." Jolten pointed where he saw the nightmaren enter.

"That's Crystal Castle! That's one of Helen's Nightopias!" Will responded frantically.

"Rachael going in there means nothing but trouble, come on let's see what she's up to!" Jolten grabbed Will by the arm and dragged him along through the door into Crystal Castle.

Jolten was in awe by the beauty of the Nightopia, despite how he tried to hide it. The way the light reflected off of the many crystal walls made it feel warm and colorful. Will could tell the Nightopia had changed since they were kids and he last saw it, one main thing catching his eye was how big the large palace now stood, now covering a large majority of the Nightopia rather than just a section, He shuddered imagining getting lost in that place *now* .

Jolten lost sight of Rachael, but continued dragging Will by the arm around frantically in search of her, not only looking for the black and white figure but any visitor that could be her as well. He was cut off in his hunt when a loud scream was heard towards the jewel mountain.

"That was Helen!" Will shouted, "aren't NiGHTS and Juliet with her too?"

"Don't know, don't care at this point." Once again Jolten took off in the direction of the jewel mountain where the scream was heard, both unknowingly flying straight into a nightmaren lair residing there.

Jolten could tell the atmosphere was feeling different, and his thoughts were reassured by the changing scenery of the sandy

ground to a murky swamp. Crocile was splashing around in the middle of it. The swamps waters were heavier than when NiGHTS and Juliet had fought in it, unknowing to Jolten, and Crocile certainly was keeping his ground easier, having no plans on flopping over any time soon.

Jolten dropped Will on the ground and began flying over to large 2nd level, "You get your friend, I'll take care of Crocile!" Will nodded and started quickly sneaking around the swamp, being sure not to attract Crocile's attention. Helen was sitting up along the outskirts appearing to be out of breath as Crocile approached her.

"Hey ugly!" Jolten shouted as he sent a bolt of lightning down behind the crocodile to make sure his attention was grabbed towards the opposite direction. Crocile began splashing towards him, hopping around the murky water. He jumped up, unhinging his long jaw and went to snap at Jolten who had quickly dodged out of the way and sent another bolt of lightning straight down on Crocile's back. He stood his ground and howled, but managed to endure the hit. Obviously, no attacks would penetrate through his rough skin on his back; his thick scales were almost like a coat of armor.

As Jolten flew around being chased by Crocile, Will hurried around the outskirts while in a crouching position to hide himself. Helen stood up, finally being out of Crocile's hunt and backed up against one of the trees of the forest simply watching the crashing bolts of lightning raining down- but none having any effect.

Realizing Crocile would not be forced over by sheer strength itself, he lifted his arms up and summoned a large tornado from the swamp, using up a lot of energy to do so. Crocile's sneering was cut off by him being swirled around in the vortex, Jolten growing it larger and larger enough to fit the crocodile's full body in. He howled as he was tossed around in his own lair. Jolten seized the vortex and Crocile was flung over onto his back, creating a large splash. Will ran up to Helen, shoving the two of them out of the splash-zone in time.

While Crocile rolled helplessly on his back in the mucky water Jolten summoned a final bolt of lightning onto the 2nd level's stomach. Crocile cried out as he accepted his final defeat, bursting into light.

Jolten flew up to the two visitors and grabbed them, flying quickly away and out of the nightmaren lair as it began to fade away. The familiar surroundings of Crystal Castle began to reappear, and the three were finally able to sigh in relief.

"Thank you… Jolten, right?" Helen glanced up as Jolten touched ground with them.

"Look at you, killing other nightmaren," Will grinned, "now you're a *real* traitor. NiGHTS is going to be *so proud* of you."

"You shut up!" Jolten dropped the two, "I didn't do it cause I *wanted* to. I'm only here to help stop Nightmayr. If this was Wizeman's work I would've left you to that 2nd level. Anyway... we should find NiGHTS and Juliet to make sure they're all cool, too." Jolten already turned away.

As if on cue as Jolten turned around, Twylight's portal opened into the Nightopia and the trio from Venturing Forest entered through. Juliet had sighed in relief seeing Jolten there, but NiGHTS kept a suspicious look on his face.

"I already know what you're thinking," Jolten crossed his arms staring directly at NiGHTS, "yes, I defeated Crocile. No, this doesn't mean I-".

NiGHTS immediately burst with laughter while Jolten stood silent with an annoyed expression. "I guess this means you get an official welcome to the team!"

"I don't need *any* 'welcome' from *you* ." Jolten crossed his arms and growled.

Chapter 9

"It's your birthday party! What's got you feeling so down?"

Helen glanced up to see her friend Hannah sitting down next to her on the steps to the gazebo. Her mom had set up tents outside, with tables full of food and alcohol, clearly making this more of a party for her own friends and family than for Helen. Like most parents do.

"I don't know… I'm just thinking about Mary. It's sad she can't come but in a way… I'm almost glad about it?"

Hannah looked a bit confused, but also kind of understood what Helen meant, "it would've been awkward, personally. She hasn't talked to me in ages… I thought that's why she didn't want to come. I don't know what I did, though."

"I know she's changed a lot… even mum's commented on it several times but I never thought it was ***bad.*** *Something weird happened when I was in town with her that I don't really know how to explain…" Helen looked away, rested her head in her hand with a troubled expression.*

"She's a weird person," Hannah shrugged, "I wouldn't think too hard on it. Just don't try too hard to get to her level if you think things are weird. Maybe just lay low for a bit."

"Yeah…" Helen frowned. She didn't want to just drop Mary, she was her best friend. But her attitude was certainly changing, and Helen feared it was already rubbing off on her. It has been for a while. How many times has she ditched her practice just to hang out with her?

Hannah stood up and forced Helen to her feet, "Come on, girl! Don't spend the entire party over thinking things. How about we go inside for a bit? I think being around too much family is driving you crazy."

Helen chuckled as she got up and nodded, "sounds fun! Anything to get away from my mum and her set up."

Helen and a few of her other friends decided to hang out inside the rest of the party, only sneaking back outside for a plate of snacks every now and then. Despite how big her house was, there really weren't a whole lot of places to hang out except for her room, which luckily was big enough for everyone to hang out in. Every other room was too...grown-up-y.

Helen and Hannah were both chilling on her bed while a few others had a game of cards on the floor with plates and food scraps everywhere. Helen knew her mom would have her head for it later.

The two girls were sitting on their phones when Hannah looked over and noticed the new ring on Helen's finger.

"When did you get that?"

Helen looked down, "Oh, the ring? Mary bought it for me when we were in town for my birthday present. Isn't it pretty?"

"Yeah, let me see it for a sec." Helen slipped it off and handed it over to Hannah, who was eyeing the small white gem at the top of the silver ring. Even the shop owner had no idea what the stone was, but it sure was pretty. Probably some sort of fake diamond.

"It's cute!" Hannah grinned, "I think it suits you."

"Mary was a little weird about it," Helen frowned, "but she figured it wouldn't hurt, I guess."

"I think she's worried about making you look too flashy," Hannah winked as she gently took hold of Helen's fragile hand, slipping the ring back onto her finger.

*"Mary? Worried about **flashy** ?" She laughed back, "Yeah, right."*

Helen's friends left the party one by one as the day went on, and Helen was forced to finally leave her room to go say goodbye to all of her mom's friends who came to see her for the party. Helen was exhausted trying to entertain these adults who she didn't even know all that well for a short while.

Finally everyone had left and her mom let her go back inside. Helen

plopped on her bed and checked her phone to see if she got any texts from Mary. She could tell her mom was moody with her leaving all the time, she always gets mad at her for not spending time together but she's the reason Helen leaves so much. Did any of her mom's friends even really care if she was there or not?

'No…' Helen thought to herself, 'you're just selfish aren't you.' she sighed. 'Mum works hard to help me… and still all I do is turn my back on her and run away….why? You'd think I'd learn by now..'

Helen tossed over on her side, facing her old dream diary. There was still time before she had to get ready for bed; she begrudgingly picked it up and opened to a page titled 'Labyrinth Guide'.

Nightmayr sat sunked back in his throne sulking after his encounter. It seemed like everything was finally going his way, but the world turned against him in a second. Maybe he didn't have the upperhand he thought he had.

He had missed his chance to find his siblings orb before the others, and now Twylight was out of his reach. They would surely be running off to the Waking World with their portals in order to hide from him. For the time being, he was out of luck. He had to find a way to be able to slip into the Waking World unnoticed, for a Nightmaren this is a rather difficult task to do. He wasn't blessed with the transformation ability that Twylight was.

He stood up from his seat, hunching over a bit in pain still. The Waking World night was almost over and he had yet to see his own visitors, and Reala and Rachael should return any moment now after realizing the orb was not able to be taken from Nightopia. Another failure.

The front doors slowly pushed open and Nightmayr looked down to see Mary squeezing through them.

"You missed the party," Nightmayr frowned, flying down to greet her.

"I suppose I did, you look awful," she frowned back at him, taking his

hand. His long claws wrapped around her own. She gently leaned in to them, the nightmaren was much taller than she was.

"Twylight has been awakened and took the red shard with them… and I have no way to find Nyght. On top of that, our little visitor friend has grown in numbers."

"I know," Mary responded, "I've seen them in the Waking World. But we still outnumber them. Nightopia's recent visitors have only gone to you and the Dream Gate fell apart as requested, there's no one else that could join them." Her lips curled into a sinister smile.

"I hope you're right about that. But I'm not worried about them. You know by now, my Night Mary… my only goal is to become the strongest nightmaren once more, you're the only one I trust enough with that knowledge."

"You said it yourself, my Lord… now that Twylight is-"

"I'll just need to take away Twylight's biggest advantage and get to the Waking World myself."

Mary tugged her hand away from his grip, laughing to herself a bit, "You're going to sneak through into the Waking World? If they see you you're' done for! Now that you lost the shard of courage to them they could destroy you in seconds."

Nightmayr heard Reala shouting from outside, and his attention was drawn away from Mary instantly perking up towards the door. His stumped expression lit up, "Go and grab the others, and wait for Reala and Rachael in the courtyard. I'll be in the old plaza waiting for you all, I'm assuming you remember the way there."

Mary took a hold of the nightmarens hand and pulled it back in close, laying a gentle kiss on his clawed fingers, "How could I forget? It is where I fell in love with you after all."

The sound of Mary's heels against the cold floor echoed up the staircase, which everyone knew to take as a sign to frantically make themselves presentable. The visitors of nightmare quickly scrambled to pull themselves together to look ready when she entered the

door.

Beforehand, most of them were lounging around and bickering. Morgan was rolling on the floor listening to Alice and Marcus argue all night while Alice had her feet kicked up on a chair in front of her. Uma was tucked away in the corner staring out of a window into void of nightmare, tired of listening to them all every single night they're here. The two while on missions act like two peas in a pod, an inseparable duo, even returning flirts back and forth with each other. No one really knew what their deal was.

As Mary opened the door to the room, the group assembled themselves together waiting to hear what the "queen" was going to yell at them about tonight. It was always something with her, she never wanted to come see them for friendly chit-chat.

"Your Lord wishes to have everyone outside in Nightmare, and before you ask I don't know what he wants."

Everyone looked at Marcus who returned with a shrug, "I didn't do anything that would piss him off in like… two days. If we did something Mary would have yelled at us by now."

Alice sighed, "yeah, point taken. I'd say maybe he's mad at Morgan but… he's always mad at Morgan."

"It is a gift," Morgan smiled, already back on the floor.

"He's not mad at anyone. Except that does remind me… you seem to be missing someone tonight?"

" *That* asshole? He never shows up unless he wants to." Marcus rolled her eyes, "Why do you even keep asking?"

"I doubt Nightmayr even remembers his name," Morgan chuckled.

"I doubt he even remembers *yours* , either." Alice looked down at the child. Morgan looked away from her.

"Let's just go see what he wants and get this night over with, I'm really starting to hate going to sleep," Uma quietly concluded. She rolled her eyes and began heading over to the recently slammed

door. Alice frowned at the other girl but followed behind, running her fingers through her hair as Morgan bounded behind her. Mary glanced around and paused herself for a bit before following the rest, her heels echoing loud against the ground once again.

Nightmayr had set himself up in the abandoned Nightmare Plaza, several scavenging third level nightmarens scurrying away at the sight of him. He glanced over to an old rotted path, now almost completely covered by greenery, knowing well it leads to the bridge between the two plazas. The path seemed to be almost unusable for a visitor at this point, most of the area did. What business would a visitor have in a place like this anyway, surely it would be incredibly boring.

Rachael's whiny tone alerted the leader of their arrival. Reala flew in first followed by Mary and the other visitors. A few nightmaren of indiscernible level straggled behind alongside Rachael.

"What is this dump?" Alice asked, making a disgusted face. Uma chuckled next to her.

"This is the Nightmare Plaza," Reala frowned, "it really is a dump isn't it? Pathetic. It's history is still but a mystery to us all."

"To be honest, *most* of this world is," Nightmayr remarked, "I know I haven't been completely open about myself to the rest of you. I'm sure it's been...frustrating…"

Reala grunted.

"The only reason was to make sure I could even get as far as I have. Let us start over with our introductions, shall we? 'All cards with the table' as the visitors say."

"Why don't you start by why you made us all come to this garbage dump," Rachael interrupted.

"Questions should be saved for the end," he shot his creation a glare, then recomposed himself, "where was I… oh that's right. First off, my name as you all know is Nightmayr… fitting right? I came up with it myself."

"I *never* would've guessed," Uma whispered into Marcus' ear with a smirk.

"I'm new to this world… or at least new to being outside in it. After Wizeman created my siblings and I he hid us away. I used to believe it was shame, that we were just more of his failures. Then I realized more and more it wasn't to hide his failure, it was to protect *himself* ." Nightmayr began to hover up in the air, leaning back into nothing, "you see, I never said anything for so long because… I wasn't sure if other nightmaren would believe me until I could prove it. Prove that Fryght exists, and I am part of him."

Reala tensed up next to Marcus, who looked up at him uneasily. Several other nightmaren began murmuring among each other.

"I don't want to destroy Nightopia, or reign over Nightmare… my goal from the start has been to find my siblings and reform the nightmaren that is stronger than Wizeman himself… power like that should not be hidden from the world."

"If Fryght *is* real," Reala yelled, "and you reform him… that *will* be destroying Nightopia and this whole world with it!"

"That's just a bonus," Nightmayr ignored Reala's anger and continued on, "NiGHTS and those other friends of his have been… rather annoying. I don't think I would feel bad about having Fryght destroy them all. I just simply don't care about this world, whether it thrives or dies is out of my emotional capability at this point. It's better to not feel guilt over it."

"So… I take it you had this meeting because you… found Fryght?" Marcus tried to make sense of the point of all this.

"Not exactly…" the leader frowned, "the two others were hidden as well. A few years ago, my sibling, Twylight, discovered my desire and hid them both away so I wouldn't find them. With Twylight's ability to create portals between worlds it was very hard to track the two down. They knew without them in the picture I'd have no way to be able to find either of the two… until now."

"Until now because… Twylight is active again?" Mary inquired.

"Until now because NiGHTS has made a special little friend." Nightmayr grinned. "Rachael, I've concluded something rather interesting since your night in her Nightopia. The girl was dreaming, daydreaming to be exact. Somehow through her you were able to teleport into the Waking World."

"I was in… the Waking World?" Rachael shook fearfully, "that's too many visitors around!"

"If too much relation occurs between the two worlds, eventually the dimensional gap will begin to crumble. There wouldn't be a difference between the two." Reala agreed, "it would take centuries before that happened, though."

"Which is why we don't have anything to worry about!" Nightmayr concluded, "I'm sure now that Twylight is awake they'll return to hiding as far as possible from me, into the Waking World. Once I find them, I'm sure I can find our other sibling, too."

"I don't know how comfortable I feel with a tall scary looking demon flying around our town," stated Alice quietly, she didn't want to try to shoot his idea down and make him mad, but it did seem a bit far-fetched. His cover would easily be blown.

Nightmayr flew down and held out his claw-like hand in front of him, "Well, in order to go to the visitor world I will need to play the part as well. Twylight has the ability to turn themselves into a visitor, sadly I do not. I really did get the bad draw with the power distribution." He looked down at the remains of Wizeman's jewels that dangled from him, "well, almost did."

He began to move over towards the crowd as everyone tensed up, some now afraid of him and some thinking he was just crazy. It was true nobody knew where this nightmaren had come from, and why Wizeman had kept close to him all this time. There was no way something like Fryght actually existed without any other nightmaren truly knowing, right?

Rachael froze as the leader brushed by her, she had a sinking feeling in her core.

Nightmayr turned himself around to face it, both their dark hollow eyes locking together.

"What are you thinking… my lord?" Rachael gaped up at him.

"I'm thinking… I'm tired of listening to your whiny voice."

Nightmayr slammed his claws into Rachael's forehead, shattering pieces and ripping a fracture out. Rachael's stare froze up at Nightmayr as she watched pieces of her own gem fall from her head. Her expression showed no anger, but was almost peaceful.

"I'm tired of listening to yours too."

His claws forced deeper through the inside void of the nightmaren. A bright light blew around the two, and as it dispersed all that was left was Nightmayr floating there with a piece of the gem that rested on her crown only moments ago.

Several Nightmaren frantically looked at each other, they all had known a 1st levels gem was made from ideya and is what gave them power and life… but none had ever seen one destroyed before. For a lesser failed 1st level, it was only obvious destroying it would mean their life as well.

Nightmayr gripped the gem in his hands and glanced over to the visitors standing there, "For this to truly work… we will all need to get along once again."

They all looked at each other nervously.

Juliet yawned herself awake, last night's event had made her feel extremely groggy upon waking up. All she had to do was get through school then she could go and see NiGHTS again… but she was sure her new team would want to meet up at the cafe too. It was weird having actual things to do in her life now. But she was almost uncomfortable with the idea of going to school and meeting up at the cafe… or going *anywhere.* It was like Nightmayr had spies everywhere… what *was* his deal?

Regardless, she still had to go to school at least. That was a given. She quickly went through her routine, even skipping a few things to

save herself time and began on her walk to school. When she walked through the doors at school, her attention was immediately caught by an older woman standing in front of the main office entrance. What had caught her attention was the smile she gave the girl and her bright red piercing eyes as Juliet walked past her, something about it was off. Was she just that paranoid now?

Her first lesson today was her History of Valland class. The professor for the class always made things fun and sound interesting, despite how boring learning about the dark days of history was. Her favorite was to hear about Valland's Medieval period… it seemed so dream-like to hear about, aside from the plague of course. That part didn't seem fun.

Today they were discussing the beginning of some war, Juliet was too tuned out to pay attention to which one. She imagined herself back in Venturing Forest exploring like normal the previous night. There weren't many Nightopians with her, but it was peaceful imagining herself back there. Juliet followed one of the paths through the woods until she reached a dead end.

A dead end? That doesn't make sense… these paths are supposed to keep looping… she thought. There was a rustling in the greenery in front of her, and out popped a large royal blue peacock. It shot its feathers up, and Juliet starred in fear of the piercing eyes that decorated them.

The bell signaling the end of the period snapped Juliet out of her daydreaming. It felt so real, she almost forgot she wasn't even actually sleeping in the first place. The peacock disappeared, and in front of her once again sat her classmates. The classroom emptied out rather quickly except for Juliet, who sat there in confusion as her mind slowly adapted back to reality. Nothing was making any sense today.

As students began to pack up their materials and run towards the door, her teacher made an unusual last minute announcement.

"Before you all pack up for your next lessons, I was informed earlier this morning that we are having a new student in class. They wouldn't tell me much about them but it sounded like they weren't

from around here, so let's all do our best to teach them about our history!"

It wasn't odd for a new student to transfer to a school, but Juliet's paranoia was still eating her alive on her walk to the cafe. What if it was Marcus coming to torment her? He already lived close to Bellbridge didn't he? It couldn't be that easy to just transfer schools right?

To her suspicions, Helen and Will had already got their usual window table at the cafe. Claris appeared to be bringing them their drinks at the moment. She wondered if they would go with her to see Claris sing after Alaia turned her down. Maybe she'd bring it up later, there were more important things to talk about first, of course.

"Hey," she said as Helen scooted over so they could sit next to each other, "how's your sister?"

Will shrugged, "I didn't see her, I woke up late and dashed out before she came down… I guess I'm a little nervous. If she saw anything weird and remembers it… I don't know."

"Last night sure was weird," Helen heaved, slumping back in her seat, "I don't remember anything like that *ever* happening. And what was that about Wizeman being gone? I knew we weakened him but…"

"I don't know that much," Juliet frowned, "all I know is something happened where he was destroyed… and NiGHTS thinks he cursed Nightopia?"

"Wizeman had a lot of power, I don't think cursing is one of them. If he wanted to do that he would've done it a long time ago." Will finally chimed in.

Helen added in again, "If Wizeman is gone… how are Nightmarens still around? If he's really gone… they should be too! That's what we were told, at least."

"Instead of worrying about why things happened… let's worry about the what." She decided to try and change the subject, maybe

NiGHTS would answer their Wizeman questions later. "Have either of you guys heard of… *Fryght* before?" she whispered towards the end.

Helen formed a stumped expression and crossed her arms, still slumped back in her seat, "I don't know about Will but… my memories are all still slowly unfogging. I don't believe NiGHTS had ever mentioned anything like that before, though."

Will nodded in agreement, "At first I thought he was talking nonsense until the other one showed up. We better make sure the last one's never found… I'm still unsure if they're trustworthy but they *did* save us all multiple times last night I guess."

"The whole situation does seem weird… and Twylight never explained to us what that stone was," Helen glanced next to her, "have you seen anything like that before?"

Juliet shook her head, "I think there was just too much going on. Maybe-"

"Helen!" A loud feminine voice called, interrupting Juliet's conversation. The three all looked over to see another teen their age strolling in, her white hair pulled up into a bun, her arm around another boy next to her.

"Oh great," Will muttered, turning away and hiding his face.

Helen nudged Juliet to let her out and she did as prompted.

"Hey Mary!" she walked away from the table to meet her friend. Something about her made Juliet feel off, but she calmly took her seat back down.

"I didn't know you'd be in town today," Mary fakely laughed, "you should have called me!"

"Well… you know things just happen like this sometimes, I guess." Helen looked over to the boy Mary had entered with, not recognizing him but immediately knowing who he was, "I'm guessing you're Nicky?"

Nicky grinned, also wrapping his own arm around Mary, "and I'm guessing you're Helen? Mary's told me a lot about you."

"Aha, well… it's nice to finally meet you! Mary's told me a lot about you, too…"

"Nicky's moving into Bellbridge," Mary announced proudly, rubbing her head against his bare shoulder, "even transferring to the school. I told him it was icky but I guess he didn't have a choice."

Nicky almost appeared to be nudging his shoulder away from her clinginess, and began to glance up at the menu with a nervous look on his face.

"Well, neither of us can see you at school but I hav-" Helen looked back other to their booth to see Will frantically giving her a 'no' signal, "Aah… I mean. I'm sure you'll find people there to hang out with."

"Hopefully we can *all* hang out together sometime!" Mary clapped her hands together excitedly.

"Yeah! Well, um. I'm working on something...important so I don't know how much time I'll have to chill-."

Mary narrowed her eyes, smiling a bit, "Important? Since when was anything aside from hanging out in town *important* to you?"

Helen shrugged with uncertainty, "Things change I guess. Anyway, sorry Mary, I really gotta go." She ran off back to the table, Mary simply let out a 'hmph' and turned to face the menu with Nicky, who was anxiously waiting for her to help him order something.

"Sorry about that…" Helen sighed as Juliet sat up to let her back in.

"Ugh," Will groaned, "so that new kid joining my English lesson is *her boyfriend* ?"

"There's a new kid supposed to be joining my History of Valland class too," Juliet mumbled, "I don't know about my other classes."

"Are you okay, Juliet? You sound off…" Helen asked a bit worried, "I

know Mary can seem intense but…"

Juliet shook her head, "don't worry. I've just had a lot on my mind. It's comforting to know the person transferring is someone you know. I was worried it was going to be Marcus or something…"

"If any more of those Nightmare Kids show their faces here they're gonna get a football to the face," Will grunted.

Juliet let out a loud yawn. The day felt so short, but so exhausting. Did the intensity of her dream last night actually tire out her physical body as well?

"I feel a little weird being here with Mary…" Helen mentioned quietly, "I think we should pack it up for today and meet back up in the Dream Plaza tonight. We should try to keep a buddy system in line while there, too."

"Well… what if we just always made sure we were with a Nightmaren? There's now three of them on our side… as well as three of us." Juliet added, "it wouldn't be hard. I'm sure they're thinking the same thing after what happened with Crocile last night."

Helen sighed, "yeah. I just wanna make sure we all stay safe. I can already tell this is going to get weird…"

Everyone agreed and proceeded to pack up up for the day to return to their homes.

Will snuck through the front door of his house, making sure it closed as silently as possible. He was still a little scared of facing his sister, they were all pretty much certain she wouldn't remember anything but he still felt awkward about it.

Unfortunately, she was walking right into the room from the kitchen as the door shut behind him.

"Hey, I didn't see you this morning you kinda rushed out, everything cool?" She asked, casually holding a glass of ice water like nothing ever happened.

"Well uh…" Will knew he backed himself into a corner. He had to

somehow ask her about last night… he couldn't be out right about it but he couldn't be vague either, "just had uh, a weird dream last night."

"Huh," Maria replied, walking into the family room to return to watching TV. There a pause between the two before she finally spoke up again, "what was it?"

Will started walking over slowly, leaning his elbows against the back of their sofa where she sat, "Don't really remember. What about you?"

"My dream?" She laughed, "I don't really remember either."

"Oh…" Will kept his position. Guess that's a good thing.

"Well…" Maria thought for a moment, and Will perked up, glancing back at her. "Nah, you don't really care."

"What is it?" He pushed. Maria was almost taken aback by his persistence, he never acted like this when they would talk before.

She laughed, "I sorta remember something familiar from it, like my brain decided to recycle an old imaginary friend. Stupid, I know. You never cared about those dreams before either."

"...Imaginary friend?" His voice dropped.

"Something like that," Maria's expression appeared stumped, like her memory just wasn't forming full thoughts, "they were a purple-ish… almost jester-like. Something about them seemed familiar but I didn't think about it too much until now."

Will froze. There was no way she could have known NiGHTS and seen them all, right? She was unconscious when they showed up. He knew he shouldn't try to break into her memories more, now that they were seeming weird to her too, but he had to know. "Do you remember anything else?" He quickly blurted.

Maria looked up at him rather confused, "No? If you care so much I might have some stories on my laptop I saved about them. You better not go lurking through my things, though. It's private."

"'Private' is another word for the whole internet, right?" He grinned.

Maria grabbed one of the pillows next to her and started jokingly whacking him away with it, "I'm serious! I'll look through for you if you *really* wanna know."

Will stepped back laughing a bit, "Alright, alright! I won't snoop! I promise!"

Maria rolled her eyes smiling before turning her back again to face the TV. Will couldn't help but to smile a bit himself before running back upstairs to his room.

Juliet tiredly entered the Dream Plaza that night. It was strange how the feeling of exhaustion even followed her into her own sleep. Hopefully, tonight would be refreshing enough to not fall asleep in her math lesson tomorrow morning.

Expecting to meet up with NiGHTS to continue their exploration through her newly formed Nightopia, Juliet was surprised to run into Twylight waiting for her as well.

"Hey Jules!" NiGHTS beamed, "glad you came back, Twylight says we're gonna have to hold off on Nightopia for tonight."

"There's time for that later. I figured you two would be meeting up here like usual. I was a little distant last night, but I want to come clean and explain everything I know!" They nodded to the visitor reassuringly.

NiGHTS crossed his arms, a little cautious of where this would lead, but he eventually gave in and signaled Twylight with a nod, "get to it then! Let's get going!"

Twylight immediately flew over and poked the air to summon one of their portals upon NiGHTS' request, "this will be a lot faster than walking there." Twylight stepped out of the way from their portal and motioned the two to go sent them back in the clearing in front of the large castle, but Juliet was positive she would never get used to the feeling of going through one of Twylight's portals. Is this how nightmaren feel when she and NiGHTS paraloop them?

Helen had already been sitting up on the top of the 3 steps up to the building, while Will was just under her on the first step. His leg seemed to be bouncing with nervousness, but Helen seemed to be pretty unaware of anything else. As for Jolten, he already placed himself against the side of the castle away from the congregation as usual.

Will perked his head up from his glum posture upon seeing NiGHTS, but he wasn't perked up in excitement. He pulled himself up and nervously began walking in the nightmarens direction, Helen just watched with confusion.

"NiGHTS can I… talk to you about something?" He muttered, but was loud enough for the other to hear still.

"Twylight wanted to talk to all of us first," NiGHTS looked over to Twylight who was beginning to trail off alongside Juliet, then beamed as he looked back down to Will "after that we can talk!"

"No…" he followed NiGHTS' gaze over to Twylight, "I want to talk to you now I think it's important."

"I don't think Twylight wants to wait…"

"I just-"

"But I promise if you want to go to Pure Valley or something after we can-!"

"Did you know Maria?" He finally blurted out loudly, silencing NiGHTS.

NiGHTS stared down blankly at him for a while, a little caught off guard from the way he yelled it. It almost took a while to process the question, but he finally responded, "Your… sister? Well, she was a little familiar I guess…-"

"I knew her." Twylight's voice seemed to echo in the silence. They didn't turn away from Juliet as she said it, they barely moved their posture. "I need to… explain a lot. Just bare with me through tonight! I promise everything will start to make sense."

Will slowly looked over to Twylight, now just as confused as Helen seemed before. Helen had already left her spot on the steps to join where the crowd now was, but Jolten obviously hadn't moved, although more intrigued than before.

"I'm sorry if I've been… dodgy. I wasn't sure if I should say certain things yet or not," Twylight began, looking rather sorrowful.

"What do you mean not sure?" Juliet looked towards Twylight, "You probably know more about what's going on than any of us."

Twylight took a deep sigh and gave a nervous smile, "Well, to be honest I'm not quite sure where I should even start with everything!"

"Maybe a proper introduction," Helen smiled, "you did show up rather suddenly…"

Twylight smiled back, "Well then, my name is Twylight. As everyone is aware already, I'm a nightmaren, and one of Fryght's lost parts. Any questions so far?" They opened up, looking around in anticipation.

"Well… it would be nice to know more about… Fryght. From an actual… well, *from* Fryght..." Juliet shrugged.

"We know Fryght was a large nightmaren created by Wizeman with uncontainable power," NiGHTS frowned, "that's why it split up, correct? Do you… have memories as Fryght?" NiGHTS recapped, adding a bit of his own inquiry from the stories he's heard in the past. It was almost like talking to a celebrity.

"That's all foggy…" Twylight admitted. "Fryght is an entirely separate being, not three personalities into one body. Fryght was a bit overpowered for a nightmaren, and when it split up it created my siblings and I! Each of us all received a different part of its power."

"So that's like your portals, right?" Helen beamed, "and I'm guessing Nightmayr has those weird shadow things? Aren't those just like Wizeman's, though?"

"I don't think those belong to him," Jolten finally chimed in, a lot sooner than the others had anticipated.

Twylight gave a furrowed look, "Well, he definitely has a hold of Fryght's brute strength. I doubt even Reala is a match for him in an arm wrestle competition."

NiGHTS looked down at the small light scratch on his gem where Nightmayr had attacked. No other nightmaren, even Reala, would ever be strong enough to even chip it. Their durability was only able to be overpowered by Wizeman. NiGHTS had seen many Nightmaren fully demolished in front of him during his time of loyalty. The thought of it caused him to shudder, luckily he wouldn't have to see it again. Even more so now that Wizeman was gone himself.

The sound of Helen's voice brought NiGHTS' thoughts back to reality, "What about the other one? There's three of you aren't there?"

"She… isn't important right now." The cool toned nightmaren dipped their head down in regret, "I promise she is safe, and because of that I don't want to involve her in all of this."

Twylight swayed around, "I guess I should explain a bit more about where we all came from. When Wizeman hid all of us, it was before he understood the power of a visitor's ideya. Only a visitor would've been able to free us," she looked over to Will with a big smile, happy to be reminiscing about her old friend "that's where Maria comes into the story."

Twylight gave another nervous grin, but began their ramble rather suddenly, "So, the story started... I think a few years ago when Maria awoke me from here in the Dream Plaza. I didn't really know anything besides my own name and my purpose, and that wasn't really clear to me either. After that, Owl taught me about the Night Dimension, and convinced me to not serve Wizeman." Twylight closed their eyes with a nervous sigh. "By that point, NiGHTS came flying over, and I had to hide, so I followed my first instinct, and transformed."

Twylight paused for a few seconds to calm their nerves. They were excited to share, but a little nervous at how their revelation would be received by their new friends. A bright light emitted from Twylight, Juliet recognized it as the same light from when NiGHTS

transformed during their time together in Lilac Plains. As the light faded, where Twylight once floated stood a young teen. Their silver hair shined against the light of the moon.

Both Helen and Will immediately tensed up, Helen stepped back a little. "That was you!" She shouted. Her hands were brought in closer to her chest and her leg posture became almost defensive.

"I was just following what Owl told me. He said NiGHTS and other Visitors didn't like other Nightmaren so I should stay disguised." Twylight, now as a young human, gave a sheepish look to the flying nightmaren.

"So that's why you couldn't dualize with me!" NiGHTS frowned, "and Owl lied that you were a Visitor without ideya? I thought Owl was the most honest friend I had!"

"...Really?" Juliet glanced up at NiGHTS.

He shrugged, "Not really, but I still can't believe he would pull something like this on me."

"With my discovery of Nightmayr, I found him while exploring the castle without NiGHTS around, and found him trapped in an orb, just like I was. Unlike me, he was slightly conscious in that form already, and he wanted help getting out, so I gullibly followed his requests to find Visitors to free him."

"So you're the one who sent us here before," Will sighed in defeat from his earlier conversation.

"I told you I had suspicions," Helen commented in defense.

"Nightmayr holds a lot of anger inside of him," Twylight sighed, "his prison leaked that aura of anger and I believe is what caused a lot of your unknown aggression."

"When I found your orb in my Nightopia, I felt really calm… is that what you mean, Twylight?" Julied inquired.

Twylight nodded, "I'm sorry, I wanted to set Nightmayr free. If I knew I would have ruined your friendships, I wouldn't have had you free

him. I'm so sorry."

NiGHTS remained silent through the rest of this conversation, not being able to find the words to fire back. He was both frustrated with Twylight, but also forgiving. In the end, it wasn't anyone's fault but Wizeman's once again.

Despite NiGHTS' silent treatment, Twylight continued, "I found my other sibling not long after that. She desperately wanted to be released. We learned more about Fryght's creation, and after we defeated Wizeman," the two purple colored nightmaren exchanged glances, NiGHTS looked surprised, "we found out that Nightmayr wanted to reform Fryght and we had to put a stop to that. I sent my sibling to a place he would never find her, and returned to my own prison."

Juliet tried to follow along the rest of the story, "So I found you after, then when I threw my bag off your orb cracked… and you were set free? That's kind of…"

"Juliet accidentally freed Twylight again, so that makes us all even." Helen smiled a bit fakely, just trying to make the rest feel better about the previous revelation.

"So," Will finally stepped up closer to the now closely mingled group, "all we have to do is stop your other sibling from being found, right? That's the only problem we have to deal with? Wizeman *isn't* behind all of this?"

"There's still those other visitors he's manipulated into dreaming in Nightmare," NiGHTS pointed out, "I've managed to conclude the reason why Nightopia hasn't had any visitors for a while is because he's been stealing them all before they reach the Dream Gate. Nightopia isn't as strong as it once was but… Juliet is doing a good job already bringing it back to life."

Juliet turned red, "It's fine, really! I mean, were all working, right?"

"One thing I want to jump back to," NiGHTS swiveled around to face the still human Twylight, "you mentioned *you* defeated Wizeman?" The nightmaren appeared almost offended.

Twylight gave an unsure head nod in response, "we overpowered him too much, and it helps that he was a bit weak already from your fights together. In the end, Wizeman destroyed himself so none of us could have the final victory, but we may as well have been the ones to finish him."

NiGHTS pouted, while glad Wizeman was gone he felt a bit frustrated that he couldn't have been the one to finally end it himself. Was the circumstances of his destruction the reason Nightmaren weren't destroyed as well? Maybe it was something else they still weren't sure of yet.

Twylight glanced down at their own torn up blue bottoms, "We all kept a piece of Wizeman after the battle. While I may have disagreements, he's still my creator. There's a lot I still don't understand about him, but it was Nightmayr's idea. He thought we could all take over his rule together."

"Nightmayr's cape right? That was part of Wizeman?" Juliet asked, she wasn't sure what Wizeman had looked like, but the torn up cape that rested on Nightmayr's shoulders looked similar to the bottoms Twylight had alluded to.

Twylight nodded, "Unfortunately that wasn't the only thing Nightmayr took from Wizeman." The grey-skinned nightmaren pulled out the small red gem from the other night, everyone creeped in closer to them to the point that they were huddled together, all curious over what the deal over it was.

"So… what is it?" Helen was eager to hear this story more than anything else so far. Something about the gem sparked interest in her.

"It's called an Ideya Shard, specifically this is the Shard of Courage. It may be small, but there's only one of each within the world, and it holds great power for the one it bonds with."

"Bonds… with?" Juliet questioned once again.

"Each Ideya Shard, when bonded with a visitor of a strong heart, can give that visitor incredible abilities." Twylight nodded.

All the visitors stared with excitement into the glittering gem in Twylight's hand, while NiGHTS remained silent.

"We've never heard of that before," Will joined in awe, "did Owl know about these?"

"Wizeman kept them hidden from everyone… I don't know too much about their history myself. My other sibling, Nyght, is the one who first discovered them. I've never actually *seen* their power be used before, either." Twylight admitted sheepishly.

"Ok, so we get what they are now," Will interrupted the reminiscing nightmaren, his voice was a little sharp "but what did any of this have to do with Maria before?"

Twylight continued, "The nightmaren Maria and I encountered together all were made with the remaining four shards to protect them. We managed to take them all back and hide them except for the Shard of Courage which Wizeman must have still held onto. I'm assuming he must have thought Maria would be able to tell him where we hid the other four, or even that she might bond to the Shard of Courage. Unfortunately for him… Maria doesn't remember anything about her adventure…" The nightmarens voice trailed off sorrowfully. They had missed their friend dearly, and it hurt them that they wouldn't be able to see her face to face again. The other night was a wonderful one-sided reunion.

"But… why would he be *trying* to make it bond with a visitor? Didn't you just say it has extreme power? That would just make the odds against him worse." Helen pointed out. It did seem weird for Nightmayr to be trying to force the shard to bond when Wizeman was trying so hard to make sure they *never* did.

"Well… I don't know for certain, but.." Twylight finally admitted they've reached a possible dead end in their discussion, "my other sibling had told me what the shards were, and what they were used for. They are how Wizeman was able to destroy Fryght upon creation. The Shard's themselves don't have any power until they are awakened by a Visitor. I think Nightmayr figured as long as he had the Shard he may as well use its power."

"That makes… no sense." Helen gave a weary expression.

"Nightmayr did not… get the intelligence of Fryght. Only it's brashness."

"Well it's comforting to know at least we're dealing with an idiot," Jolten smirked, "now that we have all of the shards we could be unstoppable, right? So where are they, Twy?"

Twylight nervously looked away from Jolten, who now pouted in return, "Actually," Twylight began explaining, "I don't know… where any of the other shards are anymore."

"What?" Everyone exclaimed in unison.

"They're hidden in the Waking World… I know it was probably not the best idea to bring a Night Dimension item into the Waking World but I'm the only nightmaren who can travel between the two! There would be no way for any nightmaren to find them and since Ideya only exists within the *dream world* , their powers would never be able to be awakened there."

"They could be anywhere!" Will shouted, "the real world is huge! What if we actually need them?"

"Well… I suppose it is a smart hiding place. But I feel like hiding them like that is exactly what *Wizeman wanted* to do. Isn't that just helping out the nightmarens we're trying to stop?" Helen seemed worried.

Twylight was just in hiding them all over the Waking World, but Helen also had a good counter point. They just helped out Nightmayr more by doing that. "I mean…" Juliet sheepishly cut into the bickering, "we're assuming any of us would be able to even use that power anyway. Even if we *had* them, there's no saying in if we could *use* them, because Twylight mentioned them having to bond to a visitor, so..." The others began to calm down, realizing Juliet's point was more clear than their own. Twylight *did* mention they would only awaken to a visitor of a strong heart… How strong did it mean?

"For now it's best we keep the Shard of Courage safe," Twylight opened their palm back up to reveal the small red stone, then glanced up at NiGHTS, both of their bright aqua eyes locking, "NiGHTS, I believe it will be the safest in your care."

"With… me?" NiGHTS repeated in awe, "why? Shouldn't we just keep it in Juliet's bag or something? Or with you?"

Twylight shook their head doubtfully, "I think it'll be best with you. Maybe it's just because it reminds me of the one on your chest," they chuckled. NiGHTS looked down embarrassingly at the large red diamond protruding out of their torso. They both did have an uncanny similarity.

"I guess I can't argue there," he chuckled back. As he took the shard from Twylight's hand a small light burst from his vest. On the lapel of his vest he formed himself a small pin where the shard easily snapped in, "fancy," he remarked to himself.

"So I guess that's that?" Will concluded for the group, "anyone else have anything they wanna admit?"

The group glanced around from one person to the next, but no one else seemed to have anything else to say.

"Well then," NiGHTS shot up, "there's still some time left before you guys have to wake up. Juliet," he turned excitedly towards the visitor, "what do you say to some more 'forest venturing'?"

"Alright!" Juliet bounced. She hiked her bag back up, holding onto both straps around her shoulder as she NiGHTS began heading off from the group.

"Well," Jolten hovered upside down above the remaining two visitors, "you never did get to show me that obnoxious Nightopia of yours before, you still wanted to anyway."

Will laughed, "sure, Jolten. May as well find *something* to do to kill some time." The yellow nightmaren felt a bit insulted.

"What about you, Twylight?" Helen asked the lilac nightmaren as they were left alone, "Do you have any plans for tonight?"

"No," they sighed, "but I suppose I should accompany you the rest of the night in case anything happens. Did *you* have any plans?"

"I suppose any Nightopia would do…"

"Well…" the nightmaren muttered quietly, blushing a bit, "that one Nightopia of yours I saw those years ago was rather nice… I would like to see more of it!"

"Memory Forest it is, then!" Helen beamed, "That one's always been my favorite anyway… I haven't been able to visit it yet. I wonder if it's changed at all? Crystal Castle certainly seemed brighter than before."

"As you grow your heart will begin to change, it is only logical your Nightopia would change and grow with you," a familiar old voice cooed from above. Owl was flapping down to greet the two, "hoo dear, it seems I've missed the crowd. The Nightopian's in Lilac Valley were causing quite the havoc."

Helen laughed, "hello, Owl!"

"Hello, Visitor! And it is wonderful to see you again too, Twylight! I do hope you *both* have been enjoying your return to Nightopia. I only wish it was in a better circumstance."

"It's been beautiful, Owl," she curtsied slightly, "you've missed quite a lot!"

"Hoo! Perhaps you two could fill me in on our way to Nightopia, hm? That is if I'm invited along to your night out."

Twylight chuckled, "We'll do our best to fill you in," they began to slowly flutter away, still making sure it was a pace the other two could keep up with. They smiled as they glanced back, listening to Helen as she began to explain to Owl with such amazement in her tone.

Chapter 10

Will looked up from his textbook to see Jake across the room, sitting on a desk surrounded by a bunch of other boys in the class. They were all huddled around his phone laughing, probably at the expense of that girl they ran into in town.

"Come on 'Taylor get over here! You haven't watched it yet!" Jake called from across the room.

*"I was **there** , Jake. I don't need to see it again," he groaned.*

"Come on! Even your girlfriend thinks it's good." Jake chided, muttering the word 'girlfriend' spitefully.

Vivian, a mutual friend of the two who goes by the nickname 'Vii', was sitting next to Jake on her own phone, "I wasn't laughing at you, idiot. I'm on my phone." She chuckled, "the videos pretty funny, still. Funny in the sense that you're stupid."

The bell rang and the group began to disperse. Will packed up his things and slung his bag around his shoulder, getting ready to leave when Jake approached him on the way out.

"What's your deal lately dude? You'd usually find this shit hilarious."

"I don't know it's just… not that funny?" He shrugged and tried to walk past Jake. Jake grabbed his arm and pulled him back over.

"Listen 'Taylor you better get over this weird mood of yours. It's driving me crazy and you're making me look bad," he huffed.

*Will brushed his grip off, " **I'm** making **you** look bad? It's not always about you, you know. I'm all for standing up for your friends but lately you just take it too far. I can't really trust you anymore." He rushed out of the classroom and chased after Vii, not really feeling any better than he was before. Jake stood there, confused and angry. Between the girl in town and now his best friend telling him off he was fed up.*

"What's troubling you?" A familiar female voice calmly spoke behind him. Jake turned around to see one of the girls they ran into from town. The bright white-hair was unmistakable.

*"What the hell? What are **you** doing here? You don't even go here! How did you even sneak in this room, creep?" He responded nervously, knowing he's been showing everyone the video of her friend, and to be honest he was a little scared of the intimidating energy her friend radiates when she's around.*

"I'm just visiting. Visiting you, that is."

"Look I'm sorry I'll delete the video if that's what you want but-"

*The girl laughed, "I'm not here about **her** if that's what you think. I noticed you're having some… issues with people in your life is all."*

Jake narrowed his eyes, "so what? Why do you care?"

"Because…" she smiled, "I know how to make you feel better."

NiGHTS and Juliet continued their time in Venturing Forest together after the meeting their group had earlier. Nightmayr's plan didn't seem to be as threatening as they thought before now that Twylight had explained everything they knew. There would be no way for Nightmayr to enter the Waking World if Twylight needed to hide again, so the chances of Fryght reforming seemed very limited. Because of this new information, the two felt rather relaxed in Nightopia.

They flew around the trees and viewed the Nightopian's of the world sleeping soundly in the burrows of the trees. They looked almost like little birds all cozy in their nests. Suddenly, NiGHTS slowed down his flying, glancing behind him a bit.

"We're being followed." NiGHTS cautioned Juliet.

"Followed? How can you tell?"

"I get a sense while I'm in Nightopia, there are Nightmaren

everywhere after all."

"S-so what do we do?" Juliet panicked.

"Well," NiGHTS grinned, "if it's anything like the last big guy we dealt with, maybe we can lose it!" He took off flying, swinging around trees

"Sounds like fun!" She grinned back at the nightmaren.

The two took off, swinging through the trees and ripping off the leaves that covered them as they flew by. No matter how fast they flew, though, NiGHTS still couldn't shake the feeling of being watched off. Juliet felt it too now.

NiGHTS slowed down and began to look around anxiously. The atmosphere of the nightopia was quickly changing, and all the trees began blurring together. Juliet looked up to see a crowd of large bright purple eyes staring down at her, each about the size of her own head.

The eyes all blinked in unison before closing for good, and lowering back into the darkness. In their place, a large royal blue peacock head sprung up. It lifted its wings and blew NiGHTS and Juliet back, slamming them against what appeared to be a cage.

The forest had now completely disappeared. The duo found themselves inside what appeared to be a large fancy bird cage. On the outside of the cage was the inside of a castle tower. It was rather dark, and hard to see much else.

Ahead of them, the large peacock chirped and ruffled its feathers, standing proudly and staring down at them inside the birdcage.

"Do you know this one too, NiGHTS?" Juliet nervously managed to speak.

"Scopopea. He normally stayed away from other Nightmaren, I'm afraid I don't know much else besides his name."

NiGHTS was cut off by Scopopea spreading its tail feathers once more, lashing out at the dualized pair with his sharp break.

The two flew out of the way just in time before Scopopea flew over to the other side of the cage. The gust of air NiGHTS left in place hit one of the peacock's tail feather eyes for a moment. When Scopopea repeated his attack, lifting up his feathers in a dance and lashing his beak out at them Juliet noticed the eye that was hit was now closed shut.

"The eyes on his feathers look really sensitive. Maybe we should aim for them?" Juliet suggested.

"It looks like he only lifts them up when he's going to attack, that would only give us a moment to hit before he lowers and closes the eyes again." NiGHTS responded while dodging another attack quickly.

"I don't know if we're fast enough like this!"

"Maybe not…" NiGHTS flew down to the bottom of the birdcage, Scopopea remained flying around above them. NiGHTS opened out his hand and a golden mask appeared in it, similar to the one Juliet noticed Reala had before when they first met.

"What is that, NiGHTS?"

"It's called a Persona. Normally, Reala and I would wear them as a symbol of loyalty to Wizeman. This, however, is going to perform a different service for us."

"What?" Juliet asked. NiGHTS simply glanced over and grinned and put the mask on.

In a flash of light, NiGHTS form had completely changed into that of a small rocket. He dashed back up into the fight in a mere second, and Juliet was completely taken back by this reveal.

"What!" She yelled, "NiGHTS, this is awesome! You never mentioned you could do this!"

"I can do a lot more, too! I can turn into almost anything! At least, I think I can. For now this should give us enough speed to knock Scopopea blind!" Juliet nodded, and waited for the right moment for when to fly in.

Scopopeas feathers slowly started lifting up and the dualized pair launched forward, crashing right into a group of feathers causing Scopopea to flail downward. They repeated their strategy over and over until all of his eyes were closed shut. Then, NiGHTS blasted into their side to truly finish the bird off.

Scopopea squawked and fell down, hitting the bottom of the cage before disappearing in a burst of light, signalling his defeat.

The birdcage slowly faded away back into Nightopia and NiGHTS removed his Persona Mask, changing back into his normal form and undualizing with Juliet.

Both were extremely out of breath from flying around, and Juliet had a hard time adjusting to walking once more.

"Well… we did it," NiGHTS heaved, bent over and caught his breath.

"But where's the ideya?" Juliet looked around the world frantically.

"Let's just say I don't think that's the last we'll be seeing of Scopopea, either."

"What does that mean?" Her voice quieted down from the rush of excitement.

"Hmm…" NiGHTS crossed his legs in the air and began to ponder. Maybe it had something to do with how Crocile returned, too. But why?

A bright purple circle opened up in the air almost blinding Juliet, catching her extremely off guard. Twylight flew out of it.

"Hi!" They greeted, "Helen woke up, so I figured I'd come see what you two were up to."

Twylight seemed a lot more comfortable and outgoing than they did before. Having released everything off their chest probably made them feel amazing, and Juliet was glad to have them part of the group officially.

"We just fought another nightmaren sent after us," NiGHTS

recapped to Twylight, "Juliet's Ideya wasn't recovered, which means this one is a lot stronger than Crocile. Even Crocile's return has been bugging me…" he admitted without elaborating, but Twylight understood what he meant.

"You mean how he was able to return even after you two had been defeated, right?"

NiGHTS crossed his arms, "when Wizeman started to get desperate to catch me, he put a lot of energy into powering up the 2nd Levels he created to be able to attack me again. On their own, Nightmaren shouldn't be able to crawl back a second time without being powered up by Wizeman."

"It looks like you're catching on to Nightmayr's power," Twylight smiled regretfully, "I only knew of it through my siblings memories, I haven't seen it in action until now."

NiGHTS glared at Twylight, "I noticed it back during our fight with him. Wizeman's remains around him like that, he's been using Wizeman's powers. The shadow marens, luring Visitors, powering up Nightmaren…"

"Nightmayr's power he obtained from Fryght is the ability to take and use the powers of whatever he holds." Twylight explained, "he can't just steal powers whenever he wants to, though. He needs to keep the source with him in order to absorb it…"

"...meaning that whatever, or *whoever* he takes it from must be destroyed in order to obtain that source." NiGHTS finished, concluding the rest himself. "That's why he wanted to activate the Shard of Courage! He wanted to absorb its power!"

Twylight nodded, "Nightmayr currently holds what remains of Wizeman's power. But I think he's scared of using it *too* . If he truly was capable of using *any* of Wizeman's abilities he would've destroyed all of you back in his lair. That doesn't mean we shouldn't still be cautious, but I don't entirely think he knows exactly what he's taken for himself. He's not exactly… bright."

While the two Nightmaren were conversing Juliet hardly even

noticed her body beginning to fade away. She wanted more time in Nightopia, but it looked like it would have to wait for now.

Juliet sat down in her break period next to Will again, surprised but glad to see him back in the room. It was probably an excuse for the two to get to see each other before school ended. His desk was cleared off and all he seemed to be doing was texting on his phone, she presumed with Helen.

"Hey?" she said, scooting her chair closer to the desk. Will jumped a bit.

"Sorry," he said groaning, "today's been weird."

"I can't say the same for me… it's been relatively normal for once," Juliet confessed sheepishly.

"It's Mary's boy toy, he's freaking me out." He leaned his elbows upright on the desk, rocking in his seat a bit, "have you seen him yet?"

"No, I don't see him till my next class… what happened?"

"Well… nothing *happened* , I guess," Will answered, "his attitude is just… off in a way. It's not like he's ever seen me before, so I don't know why he just kept *staring* at me the entire time."

"I mean he technically sort of knows Helen, right? Maybe he just recognizes you from her," Juliet tried to ease his paranoia.

"'Sort of' is an overstatement. She told me she's never seen him with Mary before. Not even pictures!"

Juliet shrugged, "I don't know. I don't even know if I have any classes with him today. Is that it, though?"

"Don't make me feel bad for overreacting," he grunted, "I guess I've just been on edge around here now. You know I haven't seen Alice at all today? I know she's not even in our grade but she's probably still stalking you around, right? And who else is in on this?"

"That doesn't mean we can be suspicious of everybody. I mean, I

feel uncomfortable walking around too but… if we start acting too outwardly paranoid it'll just cause more attraction."

"Wow," Will sat back in his chair, "I don't know how you're able to act so calm about this, especially considering they're all following *you* around."

Juliet looked down at her desk as she pulled out her own homework, "I guess I just don't want to think too hard about everything that's going on. There's still a lot to be positive about, if Alice thinks she's gaining anything by hiding behind textbooks across from me that's her own problem to deal with…"

Will was silent for a while as Juliet stared down at her work not writing anything, lost in thought. "Well," he finally spoke up, "maybe I am just paranoid. Maybe I'm just judging Nicky based on my opinion of Mary… you're right, we shouldn't be pointing fingers at anyone."

Juliet just smiled and nodded without looking up from her zoned-out position. She was almost hoping to have a class with Nicky today, just to have her own opinion. Who knows, maybe if Mary and Helen *are* good friends they could all be allies.

As the day continued, she took her usual seat in her math lesson as Ms. D walked in, and to Juliet's surprise, was followed by Nicky. He had one strap of his bag swung around his shoulder and was walking in a very nonchalant fashion into the classroom. The two teenagers made eye contact with each other, and he gave a smile and nod to Juliet as he brushed past, following Ms. D over to her desk. Juliet felt herself shriveling up with embarrassment.

As the rest of the class filled up the room, Juliet noticed Alaia was not in class. *Odd* , Juliet thought, *she was in English this morning* .

Ms. D took her stance at the head and began to silence the chattering students. "Good afternoon, everyone! Hope you all had some sweet dreams last night. Today is going to be a simple review day, I have some worksheets to pass out you can work on for the class period in groups if you'd like. Before that, though, we do have a new student in your class. Nicholas would you like to introduce yourself?"

"Not really," he grunted, grinning up at the teacher. Several other students chuckled.

"Well, I can see you're going to be a jokester, huh?" She smiled forcefully, then rephrased " *please* introduce yourself."

Nicky stood up in annoyance, pushing his desk out for some standing room, "First off, don't refer to me as Nicholas. Just Nicky, it's cooler. I just moved here to Bellbridge, and I can't wait to be in class with everyone or whatever I'm supposed to say." He fell back into his seat. Was he… blushing?

"That was… nice!" Ms. D smiled, "well, I hope we all have a great year together." She turned around to grab the worksheets on her desk, Juliet could tell she was a little tense.

Other kids in the class already began to congregate with each other as Ms. D began handing out the review sheets. Juliet glanced down at the stapled packet as it hit her deck, looking at some of the problems. Piece of cake.

Most groups of students were hardly even looking at the review, just sitting around in circles chatting and playing on their phones. A few groups were working on problems together, some flying through the page more than the rest. As usual, Juliet fell into the group of 'quiet kids who work by themselves all class'.

The review was easy for her, and she found herself about halfway through the first page within the first few minutes. Her mind was focused on nothing except the math until a hovering presence stood next to her. Nicky.

She looked up from her paper a bit confused, "Can I help you?" she asked him quietly.

He took his own worksheet, and slammed it down on her desk, "Help me with this."

Juliet was taken back by his almost demanding tone, "you need help?"

"Yes. You're good at this right? You're good at helping people with

this."

"Ah, yeah. I am. How do you know that?"

"Someone told me," he gave a vague response, "So you're going to help me now."

"S-sure." Juliet agreed hesitantly, "pull up a chair. Do you have a calculator for the class yet?"

"A what?" Nicky grunted as he dragged a chair over loudly.

"A… a calculator?" She picked up her own, holding it up confusingly.

"Oh! Yes, that."

"So you do have one?"

"What? No, I don't. Where do I get one?" He leaned against the desk, uncomfortably close in Juliet's personal space.

"Uh you can just… buy one? We can just share mine the rest of the period," she slid the small purple colored calculator in between the two of them.

Trying to help Nicky out with the work was tedious, it was like he had never seen a number before in his life. Juliet knew he was new to *this* high school, she didn't realize he was new to *high school.*

"There's no homework for tonight," Ms. D spoke up as the lesson was about to end, "but if you bring your review in next class complete it will count for bonus points on the test."

Nicky looked fiercely at Juliet, "I want those."

You need those , Juliet thought to herself, "Well, you caught on pretty fast and know most of the formulas we have to know, so I think you'll do good finishing it up."

"No," he said sternly, "you will help me finish this, right? You're… good at this."

"I mean, I have to help someone else already today so I don't really have-"

"You're going to help me instead," Nicky stood up, slinging his bag over his shoulder again, looking down at Juliet with almost glaring eyes, "the library, right? I'll see you there."

He left before Juliet had the chance to say anything, great. The way he talked was strange to her, almost like he was *trying* to be friendly but still with an immense amount of arrogance. Helen mentioned she's never actually seen him out with Mary before, maybe he just wasn't good at communicating. New schools can be stressful too, she learned that after meeting Alaia.

Her last class of the day was uneventful, and she couldn't wait for the day to be over so she could be back in Nightopia. Unfortunately, she remembered her forced tutoring period after school today, it was even more awkward for her when she had to explain to Will as they caught each other in the hallway.

"Hey, sorry," she began, "I'm not going to be able to stay after with you today." She wanted to sound as vague as possible, but of course he wouldn't have that.

"Why not? Is something wrong?"

"Well, no…?" Juliet scratched her head, "I, uh. Nicky actually wants me to help him with *his* math. He's… not very good at it."

"Oh?" Will narrowed his eyes towards the other teen, "if you're sure about that. I mean, I'm basically caught up to where my class is so I guess I don't… *really* need the help anymore, but…"

"Don't worry!" Juliet frantically reassured him, "and I'm sure you'll be fine, you're nowhere near as far behind as he is, trust me. I don't know how long he'll keep me, though, he's pretty… determined. We probably won't be able to stop at the cafe, either…"

Will shrugged, "we pretty much regrouped last night so it's no big deal. Just be careful around that guy today, alright?"

Juliet nodded determindley, "I will! I know you may not like them, but

if Helen trusts the two of them maybe we can use their help in some way."

"Yeah… maybe," Will began turning away from Juliet for the day to head out home. She felt a little guilty, but she was almost excited to go back and see Nicky. Under his frustration, he could end up being a really nice guy.

Juliet solemnly headed over to the library and noticed Nicky relaxed in a very familiar spot. "Where have you been? I've been waiting for almost three hours." Nicky hissed, lounging his legs up on Juliet's usual table in the library. She was hoping it was a coincidence he knew exactly where she sits after school.

"Three… hours?" Her eyes widened in confusion and shock, "school ended ten minutes ago. Did you come straight here after class?"

Nicky blinked at her, portraying the same confusion she felt, "Uh, no…" he looked away angrily, "I had other things to do but then I didn't feel like wasting the rest of my time at other classes I don't care about."

"Well," Juliet smiled sheepishly, "that won't exactly do you any good. You have to actually *go* to your classes, especially on your first day for some of them."

"Instead of lecturing me about things I don't care about, let's cut to the chase with this session, hm?" He narrowed his eyes, leaning further back into his seat.

"O-okay…" Juliet nervously moved around to the other side of the table, emptying her math materials from her bag. Nicky watched her anxiously. "You're… going to have to get your paper out.

"Yeah, I knew that," the other teen snapped defensively, swiping it from his bag sprawled out on the carpet.

"Ok, well… let's start with what specifically you're stuck on and go from there?"

"It's all hard," he mumbled in frustration, "but you can make it *not* hard… interesting." Nicky dropped his elbows on the table and

narrowed his eyes towards Juliet, almost as if he was suspicious of something.

She tried to ignore his glare and looked down at her own supplies, "You just need to finish the review, right? I mean, I doubt Ms. D going to actually grade your test for tomorrow since you're new so it doesn't really matter…"

Nicky leaned back in his chair with his arms now crossed, "It doesn't matter, does it?"

"I mean-!" Juliet perked up, "I can still help you finish it, but I just wouldn't worry about it being complete."

He grinned and simply nodded towards the other as the two started their tedious tutor session.

Will nervously peered around the door of the library entrance. *What are you doing* , he thought to himself, *just leave then alone* . Unfortunately, he knew it would be impossible for him to just ignore it and leave. Something about the way Nicky looked at Juliet bothered him. *Especially* when he considered who Nicky was dating, everything about him rubbed Will the wrong way. This time he was certain it wasn't just his distrust.

He ducked under the window and cautiously crept into the library. He scurried along the edge of the room in order to dodge either of the other twos gaze, receiving a few weird looks from the librarians in the process. There was a row of low bookshelves along the left side of the library which was far enough away from the crowds of tables yet close enough to keep an eye on anything suspicious. Will crouched just out of the view and made his way behind it, able to peek over and through without being noticed.

There weren't a ton of kids in the library after hours today, Wednesdays usually weren't that popular for loitering around the campus. Overall the room was fairly silent, which made the sudden quiet voice from next to him make Will flinch even more.

"Didn't expect to see you here, I thought you got booted for today," it was Alice. She took a seat on the floor next to Will, glancing over

through the bookcase towards Juliet and Nicky.

"Of course you know about that," Will mumbled, now feeling even worse about this entire situation. He looked to Alice as her focus was on the others, his attention was towards the pink notebook she held in her arms. She always seemed to have it with her when she was sneaking around. "Let me guess, is that your spy journal? What are you 9 years old?" He snapped jokingly, reaching over and grabbing it from her while she was distracted.

"I remember when you used to be polite," Alice sharply remarked as she ripped her notebook back, holding it tightly in her arms now.

Will grunted, "and I remember when I didn't have to worry about you *spying on my friends* ."

"Oh? Like what you're doing?" She grinned.

"I'm- not spying!"

"Then what do you call… exactly what you're doing?" Alice narrowed her eyes, she had a proud expression on her face.

Will silently, get sharply peered back through the bookcase towards the study session, "It's none of your business, you can write *that* down in your stupid diary."

Alice huffed and stood up, still clutching her notebook tightly, "Fine, maybe I will. I wouldn't get too close to those two, though. I don't think she's going to be too happy knowing you don't trust her friends enough still. I don't see what the big deal is."

As she stood up, she made an effort to stand out as much as she could, catching the attention of Juliet as she glanced up to check the time. Alice made eye contact with her, and gave a snarky grin. Juliet glanced downwards slightly and saw a glimpse of Will, covering his face in embarrassment.

Alice let out a small sigh before prancing back off out of the library, Will running out behind her not too long after. Sometimes he hated being brought back into all of this, and now Juliet and Nicky are probably laughing at him, he thought. How was he going to face

anyone in Nightopia tonight?

Chapter 11

As practice for the day ended the locker rooms began to fill up with a hoard of exhausted teenage boys. All shouting, running around and ready to go home. Jake walked over to his locker and opened it up to get his bag silently as everyone else walked past him, glancing over and watching Will at his own locker in the corner by himself. Jake took his bag out, threw on his jacket and slammed his locker shut causing a few other boys next to him to jump and run away.

He began storming over towards Will, but managed to stop and compose himself and continued his strut calmly.

"What do you want, Jake?" Will sighed, not even bothering to look up from his own focus.

"Look, dude. It's been a month. Can you please talk to me?"

Will shut his locker and looked back at Jake finally, swinging his bag over his shoulder, "Fine. What is it?"

Jake shuffled in place, looking genuinely awkward- and almost sincere, "in case you decided to forget it's my birthday this weekend… it is. My parents are leaving the house for me to have a party… and I'm still gonna invite you. Vii's going too if it makes you feel better. Everyone on the teams going, and some other people from school so... Look, we don't have to hang out or talk, but having you just come over would mean a lot. You never missed it before, so..."

"I don't know," Will muttered a response, starting to walk away. Jake grabbed his arm and pulled him back rather forcibly.

"Dude can you please just… think about it?"

The two looked at each other for a while before Will finally shrugged, "Fine. Just for a little bit. My dad freaks out if I'm out too late alone anyway."

Jake smiled and nodded, "I get it, dude. Thanks for thinking about it."

Will passed Jake and headed outside, now leaving the other alone in the locker room. Everyone else had deserted the area rather quickly.

"Well that certainly went well," Jake heard a familiar feminine voice behind him.

"Jesus Christ-!" He whipped around to see Mary sitting on one of the benches, "don't freaking do that creep! How did you get in here? This is the freaking boys room!"

"I'm sure there's more important things than me letting myself where I please."

"I already told you last time I'm not joining your creepy group! Seriously. Go away." Jake stared the girl down.

Mary sighed, "I knew you were going to say that. I just wish you'd understand how much better you'd feel with us. You already know you're above everyone else, but you could show them, too. They'll never appreciate what you do," she looked up at him grinning.

"Again with that talk. I know I've messed up. Can't you let me fix things on my own? I don't need any creepy other-wordly shit messing with my life, especially from some weird witch like you."

"That's a new name," Mary laughed, "but you really think you can do this? Fine. How about I visit again this weekend? If you really don't want to be part of us then, I'll leave you alone. Assuming I'm invited to the party, that is."

"You're not invited to anything," Jake grunted as he passed her to finally go home for the night.

The quiet vibe of Venturing Forest was relaxing and nostalgic for Juliet. The familiarity of the surroundings taken from her own memories made the Nightopia a lot more personal to her than the

one she had spent her time in previously. Juliet sighed, she had no time in her day to go outside and explore anymore. *I guess that's what growing up means, though* . At least that's what her mother always told her.

She and NiGHTS were dualized flying around the Nightopia cautiously, knowing Scopopea was still on his prowl in the darkness of the woods. NiGHTS had been more silent than usual, assumingly he was too focused on finding where the royal 2nd level nightmaren was running about. Juliet couldn't help but to wonder if there was something else on his mind, lately he's seemed a lot more focused than the first night she met him.

"I used to go hiking with my parents all the time in the forest by my house," she began to recall out loud to break the silence between them. NiGHTS listened intently as she giggled to herself, "it was so fun, I loved exploring off the path and getting dirty."

"The forest has always been a favorite of mine, too! I mentioned before. I love how quiet and serene it is, even the really spooky ones!" The nightmaren joined in recollection. "Anyway… I figure I should be asking how things have been in the Waking World? Any other weird sightings?"

"Well...I just got a new transfer student in my school, I was really scared it was gonna be one of those nightmare kids. He isn't though, so there's not much else to say."

"School?" NiGHTS turned his head.

Juliet smiled in a slight laugh, "yeah, school. It's where you go to learn. You didn't have to go to a Nightmaren School when you were younger?"

NiGHTS shook his head, "no I don't think so. I was created with the knowledge I needed to know I guess, by Wizeman standards."

"Huh…" Juliet looked down, "that's weird to think about… are all nightmaren like that?"

He shrugged in mid flight, "Wizeman creates his nightmaren

knowing their purpose and abilities, he's our first thought that's placed into us upon creation. I managed to break free of his control eventually, though."

"When's your birthday?"

"Birthday?!" NiGHTS spat out a laugh.

"Yeah! Like when you were created. My birthday was last month, we should celebrate yours!"

NiGHTS smiled back at the visitor, "I don't think Wizeman kept track of that, but I'll let you know if I find out and then you do whatever celebration you want!"

Before Juliet had a chance to finish her agreement a gust of wind blew past them. It knocked them backwards a few feet, but they were easily able to regain their balance in the air. In the distance, a swirling tornado approached closer, the culprit appearing to be some more of the third level nightmaren. The tornado blew into the duo, tossing them around and throwing Juliet down the tall sky scraping trees back to the surface, where she was surprised she didn't seem to break her back at all in the process. Her breath was definitely taken away from the impact for a moment.

She picked herself off the ground and looked up in an attempt to find NiGHTS, but it was impossible to see that far up. The tops of the trees all blurred together, and with the minimal light shining through them it made her current path too dark to see ahead either. Unfortunately, she would have to find him herself. The two couldn't have been separated that far from each other, right?

Juliet did her best to gander down the winding path ahead. It surely was darker than usual, and quieter to add. She was used to hiking, having done it with her parents several times. They never had to worry about a 15 foot peacock running about on their trail all those times, though.

She began walking around without any plan of where to go to look for NiGHTS, and she didn't even recognize this part of her nightopia. Unfamiliar hills took over the path, the trees began to dense, and

she even came by a small creek the two never found before. How was she ever going to even find herself way out of here, let alone NiGHTS? Maybe if she stayed where she was NiGHTS would be able to find her first.

As she looked back up towards the trees, she once again noticed the colored markers plastered on them, one was being revolved around by a bubbly Nightopian.

Remember Juliet, if you ever get lost on these paths just look at the trees to help you. The markers on them will make sure you're on the right path at all times.

Her father's words echoed in her head. "Right!" She shouted with determination, "I don't need to be scared of getting lost here, the forest is there to help you!" She glanced in the direction of the tree she had originally found, and discovered a row of more markers ahead, all lined up together. Juliet nodded to herself to pump up slightly and began hiking forward. She jumped across the streams on the conveniently shaped stepping stones, followed forks in the road, and even crossed a bridge that swung above a deep gorge. She and NiGHTS had spent all their time traveling around the paths in the air, she almost missed how gorgeous the surface of the Nightopia itself was. She would have missed all of this if it weren't for the tornado blowing the two apart.

After a long while of trekking through her forest, the door back to the plaza was in clear sight. Waiting at the door, of course, was NiGHTS. He joyfully looked back at her, "Juliet! I was starting to get worried!"

"I know how to find my way around the woods!" She laughed, "and I see we had the same idea about returning to where we started. Good strategy for when you get separated in any situation!"

"Well," NiGHTS seemed flustered, "let's just try to not let it happen again. Hopefully those nightmaren won't be back."

"We can take them if they come back!" Juliet puffed with confidence.

"I like that attitude!" NiGHTS grinned back to the pumped up Visitor.

"I wonder what the others have been up to tonight… hopefully nothing too serious if that was all we had to deal with."

"I know Twylight and Helen went off together, same with Jolten and Will… I think as long as we're all paired together everyone should be fine! Besides, Nightmayr still seems to be focusing his efforts after the two of us…" Juliet frowned.

"Hmm…" NiGHTS looked down in thought, "you're right about that. Twylight hasn't informed me of any Nightmaren activity on their end ever since Crocile. I know you were the only Visitor in his way before but we're not the only ones anymore. I wonder what it is about you that's got him so riled up… does he know something we don't?" Juliet had a feeling something was different about her, but not in any kind of special way. Every time she tried to explain her experiences the past month even the other Visitors thought there was something weird. If Nightmayr knows something, do the Visitors on his side know, too? "Don't look so down!" NiGHTS shook Juliet out of her thoughts, "it isn't anything we can worry about right now. Why don't we get back to the Dream Plaza? I haven't bothered Owl at all tonight."

Juliet laughed, "why hasn't Owl been coming with us anymore?"

"Well there's more of us he's got to juggle I guess! If I'm being honest… I think he's been spending a lot of time by himself in the Dream Plaza now that hes returned to it. It was his original home." NiGHTS explained as the pair headed towards the door back to the mentioned location. "There's a lot of important places and remnants in the Dream Plaza, I'm sure he's been spending a lot of time catching up on these things. Did you know there's an entire hidden library?"

"A library?" Juliet's attention shot over to the Nightmaren, "Really? What kind of stuff is in there?"

"It's got all of the history of the Night Dimension in there! Before you ask, Owl and I were already checking that place out before for help with Nightmayr, there wasn't anything we didn't already know."

"Could we go check it out? I would love to see what kind of stuff is in

there!"

"Sure! Why not? Is something in particular on your mind?" NiGHTS took the Visitors hand as they headed through the door back to the Dream Plaza to fly her to their next destination.

"Not entirely," an honest answer was given by Juliet, "it would be cool to see what's there, though. I remember trying to find any type of information on Nightopia in the Waking World, there wasn't much…"

"Makes sense, it's all just a dream to you Visitors!" the nightmaren laughed.

NiGHTS flew Juliet through the Plaza, far beyond the main area. No one else appeared to be present tonight so it couldn't hurt to keep exploring together a little while longer. The forest beyond the structure of the Plaza grew thicker as they continued onward. Juliet feared they would be lost even worse than Venturing Forest before NiGHTS came to a halt. It was then that Juliet realized they *had* been following a path, but one that was very overgrown and worn down. It was easy to miss if it was not being looked for.

NiGHTS seized the dualization between the two, it would be much easier for Juliet to squeeze through on her own while NiGHTS struggled in flight behind her. Following the path a bit more led to a wooden door that Juliet was able to push open herself. Light burst into the room as she headed down the stairs that revealed themselves ahead, NiGHTS following behind her.

"There's so many books," Juliet observed as she entered the main hall of the hidden library. She walked down the path with bookcases creating short alleyways breaking from the path. Up here, the natural lighting was dim, though some magic candles would burst to light as Juliet passed them.

At the end of the path was a railing overlooking a deep cavern with a waterfall and natural light pouring into a hole in the ceiling. Looking down were more floors as well as a pond and river flowing deeper into the cave.

Looking closer the books seemed dulled and dusty from possibly centuries of sitting in darkness, each book with beautiful, extravagantly detailed covers. Each one had its own personality.

"It's not completely organized," NiGHTS explained as he pursuited the other, "a lot of years of us searching through this place with no one watching over it. You could probably blame me for the mess in here," he sheepishly admitted.

"So who wrote it all? Visitors?"

"Partially! There's a lot of recorded dream diaries from Visitors. It feels almost wrong to browse through, though.. It's like their personal dreams." NiGHTS looked up at the rows of shelves that looked as if they continued on forever with amazement in his eyes, "the fact that they're all protected here forever is truly amazing."

Juliet picked up a scroll she saw lying on the ground at her feet and unraveled it. On it she could depict hastily written text, most of it was indecipherable, but she could tell it mentioned information about Ideya. At the bottom was some sort of signature, a hand print of sorts. It looked like the talon of a bird.

"NiGHTS, look," Juliet laughed a bit as she showed NiGHTS the print, "do you think Owl wrote this one?"

NiGHTS let out a chuckle, "is our Owl a talented author?"

As if it were timed, the two heard a shocked coo from around the corner of one of the bookshelves. Owl flew out, flustered at the sight of the two.

"A-hoo! I thought I heard company here! You nearly frightened me to death!"

NiGHTS grabbed the scroll from Juliet, still feeling a slight high of joy when it comes to bothering his owl friend. "Owl did you write this?" NiGHTS questioned him, "it's got your print on it!"

Owl's feathers shot up as NiGHTS pointed the talons out, and he quickly ripped the text from the Nightmaren's hold, "that is not your business!" he snapped. "Was there something you needed here?"

NiGHTS kicked himself back in the air, "Juliet just wanted to see this place, that's all. Sorry if I embarrassed you."

Owl sighed, "yes well I suppose you can't help having a little fun here. I obviously do not own this place."

"Hey Owl…" Juliet took the birds' attention off of NiGHTS, "is it possible to have my dreams recorded here?"

"Hoo!" Owl returned to his flustered attitude, "why- ah! Apologies, it has been so long since this library was ever in use. I never considered any possible additions. Is there a specific reason you would like to?"

"Well…" Juliet frowned, "I guess so much as happened, and it seems like a lot of things no one can explain has happened, too… so maybe it would be nice to have these things recorded."

"I appreciate your desire, young one," Owl nodded, "I have been spending a lot of spare time catching up on these old 'things' you speak of. I would not mind to take it upon myself to record whatever it is you would like to save. You have a much more important duty to focus on for the time being."

"Owl's right," NiGHTs agreed, turning towards Juliet, "we have to do what we can to stop Nightmayr… maybe waiting around for answers won't do us any good."

"We can't just go back to Nightmare and stop him though… so what are we supposed to do?"

"Hoo, if I may," Owl spoke up, "I have brushed up on much of my knowledge of this world since we've returned to the Dream Plaza. If there is anything you need to know that may aid you I will assist with what I can."

"Thanks Owl," Juliet returned the offer with a warm smile, "anything that could prevent Nightmayr from succeeding in reforming Fryght is helpful at this point."

With a jolting slam of a book shut, NiGHTS caught the Visitors immediate attention as he placed the book down on the shelf next to

him, "Well, Juliet. I'd say this was a successful night of adventuring for you!" He floated down to the Visitor, who was beginning to bleakly fade away to the Waking World, "hopefully we get to do it again soon!" he gave a final call as Juliet's eye tiredly opened to the sun shining through in her bedroom.

A bright morning greeted the students of Bellbridge as the school bells rang ahead. Due to Juliet's and NiGHTS' solo outing to the library last night she wasn't able to meet up with anyone else in her dreams. She wasn't upset by it, when there is nothing going on it makes sense everyone would want to be doing their own thing. Because of yesterday, however, she couldn't shake the feeling that her new friends were being avoidant on purpose.

Unfortunately, Juliet didn't know what Will's schedule at school was like. She always ran into him by accident or would happen to pass by at times. If he was being avoidant of her, though, then the chances of any of these occurring dwindled.

Maybe she was just being nervous and overthinking things, but it's never occurred to her before about the fact that she doesn't really know either Helen or Will. Sometimes things seem fine between them all but other times the two seem to barely be able to make eye contact. She was worried maybe she was pushing things too quickly for them and for NiGHTS.

Her thoughts in the morning seemed to show incorrect, she caught Will just for a moment down the hall and managed to catch his attention with a quick shoulder grab. He whipped around to see her looking a bit surprised.

"Oh, hey," he greeted.

"Hey, I didn't get to see you last night. Sorry about yesterday…" Juliet murmured in embarrassment.

"I don't know why you're sorry," Will sighed, avoiding eye contact with the other still, "it's not your fault that dude is weird. I still think there's something off about him."

"I get what you mean… I'm just trying to have a positive attitude,

y'know?"

"Anyway," Will seemed quick to change the subject Juliet had brought up, "I did want to talk to you about something, er- ask you something I guess. Do you have plans for tomorrow?"

Tomorrow? Juliet thought to herself.

"Oh! Halloween!" Her face lit up in shock, she had completely lost track of the days.

Will stared at her, "...so..?"

"Oh, sorry. I can't believe I didn't realize Halloween was tomorrow, you'd think I'd at least remember my favorite holiday."

"Things have been pretty crazy for you so it's not that weird," he let out a slight nervous laugh, "anyway uh... no one is going to be home tomorrow night so I figured if you weren't doing anything would you want to come over to my place? I already asked Helen and she said yes but it would be… weird just the two of us so will you come over?"

Juliet grinned, "are you asking me just for that reason?"

"No!" He protested immediately, "I was going to ask you both but then I didn't see you… and then Helen said yes already so… anyway it doesn't matter."

"It's okay I'm just messing around! Just text me your address and time, it'll be fun!"

"Okay!" Will seemed a lot more relieved, "anyway I gotta go but I'll see you later!"

"Bye!" Juliet called as he ran off. She turned off in the other direction to head to her final class, ready to finish the day off strong. She turned the corner to see Alaia seconds away from stepping into her classroom door, but as the two made eye contact Alaia was happily gliding over in her direction to greet her friend in those final seconds instead.

"Soooo tomorrow's your favorite holiday, right?" Alaia grinned as Juliet walked up to meet her.

"Yeah! Can you believe I actually forgot about it? There's just been so much going on I guess." Juliet laughed along with her embarrassment.

"So that means you don't have plans?" Alaia lit up in excitement, and Juliet immediately felt a pit in her stomach. Like something inside of her completely shattered.

"Oh uh… I actually did just make plans with someone else… sorry," Juliet frowned, "I'm really sorry. I would've been totally up to doing something together, but.."

"No it's okay I get it," Alaia sighed, "you've been busy I get it. You've got more important things going on."

"It's not that! I just-"

"Juliet it's okay!" Alaia smiled, "trust me! I'm glad you have plans!" Alaia's smile appeared genuine, which relaxed Juliet a small amount. Her timing could not have been worse, but she did have to remind herself being with Alaia too much could put her in danger if those other Visitors were watching them. "I'll see you later, okay? Maybe we can plan something for Christmas together!"

"Of course! Same as every year!" Juliet grinned back, hopefully this whole Fryght fiasco would be over by *Christmas* at least.

A night where ghouls and ghosts leave their shadows to roam the streets. Where children dress up to hide amongst the scares for treats to eat and trade. Where decorations line the sidewalks, the night lit up by pumpkins and flickering candlelight. This was the ultimate night of adventure for a child, a night of pure childhood fun.

Halloween was Juliet's favorite holiday.

Will's neighborhood was filled with children crawling around in the streets. Candy littered their trails. She missed going out and trick-or-treating with Alaia when they were younger. It wasn't that long ago in hindsight, but it did feel like an eternity ago.

She headed up the long walkway that led to the front door, a bit nervous. She could head back home if she *really* wanted to but she didn't want to break her promise to Will that she'd be there. Juliet rang the doorbell, a pretty normal action to do on the night of Halloween. It took a while for a response to arrive, but eventually the door was opened by Will, and Helen was behind him to join the welcome party.

"You made it!" Helen cheered brightly.

"Well, yeah," Juliet blushed in response, "why wouldn't I?"

Will stepped aside from the entry for Juliet to see herself inside. Will's house was definitely bigger than her own but that isn't a very impressive comparison to make. Something about his house felt empty as she was invited inside to look around. It was neat and cleaned, but almost like nothing has been touched, they probably just cleaned really well for their guests, she thought.

"I already told Helen before but my sister is out tonight and my dad doesn't get home till late so we pretty much have the place to ourselves. Dad will probably just go right to sleep as soon as he gets home too, anyway."

Juliet nodded in acknowledgment while Helen already ran back to the kitchen to finish grabbing the snacks she was making. Curious to see what they had she followed. Helen was dumping a big bag of pretzels into a bowl Will had fetched for her.

"All of them?!" He stared.

"What?" Helen hid her flushed expression behind the pretzel bag, "they're good. And they all fit, mostly…" she grabbed a few that spilled out to throw back on top of the pile.

Juliet laughed and took the empty bag from Helen to throw out for her.

"I don't get a lot of junk food snacks like this at home," Helen admitted, "so I'm just excited to have some."

"Not even pretzels?" Will followed Juliet's laughter.

Helen shook her head embarrassingly, "I mean mum would probably buy snacks for me if I asked her but… I guess I just never thought to ask."

Juliet looked over the table of the rest of the snacks they had; the pretzels Helen already poured out, bags of popcorn, and some bags of random non-chocolate candy along with cans of soda.

"I told my dad I was having friends over for Halloween so he picked this stuff up for us. I think he thought I was having different friends over since he knows Jake doesn't like chocolate." He shrugged, "maybe I should've mentioned it was girls coming over, too. Oops."

"Oh well," Juliet laughed, "sour candy is my favorite anyway. Chocolate is too messy. So what's the plan for tonight once Helen finishes putting her snacks together?" she turned to ask Will as Helen began picking out the taffy candy from the bags.

"Probably just watch some movies or something. I'm sure there's a lot of scary movies on for Halloween."

"Nothing scary!" Helen turned to protest.

"But it's Halloween!" Juliet urged, "have you seen any scary movies before?"

"One when I was a kid…" Helen replied with a frown, "and it gave me nightmares so I don't like watching them."

"Well we don't even know what's on," Will jumped into the conversation again with a shrug, "so we'll just look around."

Helen sighed and scooped up the bowl of pretzels in her arms, "Ok yeah, let's just see what's on first. Oh! Maybe we could play a board game or something too! I've never really been able to do that."

"You never played board games?" Will's eyes widened, "or had snacks or watch scary movies? What do you and your friends do when you hang out?"

She started to leave the kitchen with the snacks as the others followed, "well I guess we just talk mostly. Mary usually would just

tell me about her boyfriends or be putting on makeup while gossiping. I just liked having the company to distract me so I never really cared what we did."

"Sitting and talking is what Alaia and I pretty much do, too," Juliet frowned, not realizing people might see that as a boring time, "but she has so many cool interests. I love listening to her ramble about them…" she trailed off so quietly the other two had already gone ahead and weren't listening to her. She was partially thankful, yet a little embarrassed.

She took her own time catching up, wandering down the minimalist hallway towards the television room where they were hanging out for the night. The lights were dim, making the already empty house have an even eerier vibe to it.

On the wall by the entrance to the living room were family photos that caught Juliet's eye, due to the familiar face she saw in Nightmare before.

"Hey, I recognize your sister in this photo," Juliet nodded over.

Will walked over, "Oh, yeah I guess. That's her graduation photo."

"Are those your parents?" she glanced over to the photo of a young looking couple next to it. He nodded.

Eying the rest of the photos on the wall, she let a sincere question out,"Does your mum work tonight too?"

Helen froze over by the sofa after she finished placing one of the snack bowls down, looking over nervously at them. Juliet didn't notice this reaction, however, her attention was genuine towards Will.

"Ah…" he nervously glanced away, "she actually passed… a long time ago." Juliet felt like her body just shattered into pieces. Before she could frantically apologize, Will noticed her panic cut her off, "it's okay don't worry! I didn't even know her, it was a *really* long time ago! It doesn't bother me at all that you asked."

Juliet sighed and swayed backwards a little bit, still feeling a rush of

embarrassment. She realized how little she actually knew about her new friends, it almost felt like she was intruding on them.

Luckily, the topic managed to move on rather quickly. It wasn't long before they were all chilling in the family room with "Friday The 13th" playing about an hour in. Helen was hiding her face in a blanket for most of it. Juliet's eyes became heavy from staring at the movie for a long time. She's already seen it a dozen times already, so it wasn't like she was going to miss anything if she decided to doze off for a little bit.

Her eyes closed shut like a weight had been lifted off of them, and it wasn't long before she entered a dazed half awake state while the image of Venturing Forest manifested in her mind. The pathway aligned by trees led to darkness in the distance, just as a perfect scene from a Halloween movie. She dazedly walked along the path with a strange feeling of no control. As if she wasn't lucid at all.

There was a loud caw from above her, and she flinched as her body instinctively looked up at the source. A figure darted towards her in a blur, and she wasn't able to make it out in time before a shriek from the Waking World shook her mind in place again.

Juliet only saw Helen leap up on the sofa next to her, dropping the bowl of pretzels on the floor. She followed her fearful gaze towards the television, where a hefty white and blue bird had flung itself, knocking it over, luckily not causing any damage.

"A- a bird?" Juliet joined Helen on the sofa.

Will was standing up defensively beside the two as the bird flapped back up into the air after it's abrupt arrival, and his eyes widened at the sight, "That's a nightmaren!?"

"What?" startled Juliet.

The nightmaren turned back around to face the three and would normally follow its personal instinct to attack. Even the nightmaren, however, was able to tell something wasn't right.

Helen slowly backed down from the sofa as the nightmaren flapped

silently in front of them, "it looks… confused."

"No kidding," Will retorted as he slowly inched towards the two girls, "how did it...get here?"

"Um… I don't know," Juliet partially lied, "but it seems to be pretty tame so maybe we can grab it or something."

"One of you do it…" Helen shuddered.

Juliet gave a look to Will who looked nervously towards the little nightmaren. Taking it upon herself she turned to face the nightmaren and slowly inched towards it.

The bird watched her cautiously, cocking its head without blinking as the distance between it and Juliet shortened. She was right in front of it now, only inches away. Slowly, she reached her arms out. Her hands were hovering over its body as the nightmaren let out a loud screech. It violently flapped its wings and flew up gripping Juliet's hair in its talons. Without leaving the ground Juliet was thrown around. Now the nightmaren was simply stuck, which only made it even more wild.

Will quickly dashed over while Helen backed up in a fearful response. In the scuffle Will was able to grab onto the nightmaren's talons and shake them loose from Juliet. As it was freed, the bird slammed into the ceiling causing the house to shake. A few photos fell off the walls.

With the nightmaren off Helen ran towards the other two as it flew off into another part of the house continuing it's screeching. Juliet and Will were panting as Helen joined them.

"Oh my gosh! Are you okay?" Helen asked with worry.

"I saw my life flash before my eyes but I'm fine," Juliet managed to let out a slight laugh.

Will stood himself up and frantically looked away, "Where did it go?"

"I didn't see…" Helen admitted, "I was more worried about you two."

"Agh!" Will slammed his hands on his face, "there's a nightmaren loose in my house and my dad is going to be home in an hour!"

"Hey!" Juliet jumped in, "let's stay calm and just start looking for it."

"Maybe we should s-split up?" Helen was hesitant to suggest.

Will was walking back over to the sofa and scooped up some blankets in his arms, tossing the girls each one of their own, "try to trap it if you see it. I mean it's just a bird, right?"

Juliet threw the blanket around her shoulders and ran off into the kitchen area where the dining room was. She surveyed every corner of the ceiling and even checked all of the upper and lower cabinets. Does a nightmaren even know how to open cabinets?

"I got it! I got it!" Helen screeched from where Will's dad's office was on the first floor. Juliet threw her blanket down and ran following Helen's desperate calls. Juliet and Will entered from the two opposing doors facing Helen who was on the floor, desperately holding down the lump in the blanket that was lashing about underneath. They both dove to her aid, all doing their best to restrain the nightmaren together.

Then the doorbell rang.

"Trick or treaters? Now?" Will groaned.

"I'll go deal with them," Juliet stood up and backed up towards the office door, "just keep holding it and try to think of something to do!" She sprinted for the door, hoping to deal with the trick-or-treaters as quickly as possible. Probably, it would be best to just leave the candy bowl sitting outside on the porch for the rest of the night.

She clicked the lock right and flung the door open, and her jaw dropped.

"Maria…?" she stared wide-eyed.

"Umm.. hi…do I know you?" Maria looked over Juliet to peer around the inside of the house, "are you one of Will's friends?"

"Uhh…" Juliet remained speechless, frantically looking over her shoulder. "Yeah uh...he said you were out tonight?"

"I just came back to grab my wallet and I forgot my house keys…" she stepped inside past Juliet, looking at the abandoned living room in confusion. Thankfully not noticing the television on the ground. Juliet took a few small steps backwards into the hall as Maria headed up the stairs unknowing to the events unfolding. When Maria was out of her sight Juliet turned and sprinted back to the office, shutting the door behind her.

"Your sister's here!"

"What?!" Will whispered in panic. "Where is she?"

"She went upstairs, I think she'll be in and out, but I'm not sure!"

"Trade with me," Will stood up leaving Helen to hold the nightmaren for a few terrifying seconds alone before Juliet joined her again, "I'm just gonna go make sure she leaves and keep her from going anywhere else."

"Pleeeeease hurry!" Helen cried, getting tired of putting the most energy into restraining the bird than the others.

Will ran out of the office through the door Juliet came in and bounded upstairs to catch Maria, hoping to guide her in and out as fast as possible,

"Hey," she noticed him running up as she left her room, the door clicking shut behind her, "I met your friend, I don't think I've seen her around before?"

Will jumped out of the way to the top of the stairs, successfully hoping the opening would make Maria walk past and head down. "Yeah she's a friend from school," he answered as he quickened his pace behind her down the steps.

"Is Vivian here? I haven't seen her in a while. It's nice to see you having friends over again."

"Uhhh no, Vii was uh, busy tonight."

There was a crash from the office and Maria froze on the steps.

"Hey what was that?" She worryingly peered over the railing.

"Probably nothing!" Will slipped under Maria's arm on the railing as she stormed down like a concerned parent and he threw himself in front of her, blocking off her way to the office, "I'll go check! It'll be fine, you should go back out, I can handle things!"

She stood frustrated for a moment before giving a defeated shrug, "just don't destroy the house, okay? I know your friends can get pretty rowdy."

"Um… right. Anyway bye!" He followed behind her with some slight shoves as Maria turned to head back towards the front door. He waited until he saw her get back into her car and drive off before running back to the office swinging the door open. "What was that noise?" His eyes widened at what he walked into.

The nightmaren had managed to fly up, still inside of the blanket. Helen and Juliet were desperately clinging onto its edges. It didn't take Will long to join the struggle.

"Ok I have an idea," he announced, the other two looked over intently, "one of us needs to go and wait at my basement door, and we'll try to throw it in and lock it. No one in my family ever goes near the basement. Hopefully we can figure out what to do after that?"

"I'll go!" Helen jumped at the opportunity to ditch the other two with the nightmaren. She joyously let go of her grip on their homemade net and ran for the door to the basement which was just outside of the other office door. "It's open!" she called, standing ready to slam it shut as soon as Will and Juliet whipped the bird, blanket and all, down the stairs. Helen followed through with slamming the basement door shut as fast as she could while Will reached up to push the lock on the door closed with a satisfying click.

The three stood in front of the door, unable to say anything to each other with no breath. Helen threw herself against the wall and slid onto the floor panting, "well that was an eventful Halloween."

Will's body fell heavily onto the floor as well, "anyway now that we took care of that for now, can we talk about the *heck* happened?" His question was general, but his focus was on nobody but Juliet. "You said a nightmaren attacked you at school, right? You weren't *kidding* ?"

"I told you!" She turned red, "it was a bigger nightmaren, though. One that looked like NiGHTS… and I remember seeing another little one like this at the Halloween party, too."

"Are Nightmaren escaping into the Waking World?" Helen spoke up in worry, "how are they even here?"

The two looked only at Juliet, knowing something was connected, and she would look at herself if she could too at that moment. Every time a nightmaren appears in the real world she always sees them in Nightopia first. Nightopia… while she's daydreaming.

"I need to talk to Twylight tonight."

Chapter 12

Music was blasting from every window, that's how Jake liked it. You couldn't hear everyone else's annoying conversations, but it was fun to eavesdrop sometimes. That's the only way you get to catch up on whatever school drama was going on.

He carried two large cans of coke in his hands, sliding one over to Vii as he jumped up on the counter seat next to her, "I remembered your favorite," he grinned.

Vii took the coke casually, "my favorite's cherry, actually."

"Oh, uh. I knew that I just meant that-"

"It's fine," she laughed to herself, "I really don't care. Your music taste is garbage, by the way."

"You always thought it was garbage. Why'd you even come if you hate everything I do."

Vii slammed the empty can of coke down after chugging it while Jake complained, "Why'd you invite me if you know I hate everything you do?"

Jake went silent.

"You know I'm just here cause Will wouldn't bother coming if I wasn't here. I'm tired of you two fighting, just try to get over it tonight?" Vii hopped off the counter seat and went to talk to another group of kids leaving Jake alone again.

Jake sat still for a moment then grunted, shoving his can of soda away. He doesn't even like coke.

Normally with all the music, he wouldn't notice a sound as vague as knocking on a door. But his attention was so hyper focused on it he nearly booked it the second the first knock hit the front door.

Jake opened the door to see Will standing there, but he didn't look happy.

"Hey dude! Thanks so much I promise I'll-"

"I get it, don't overdo it." Will walked past him and already began looking around to see where Vii was.

"I'm surprised you're actually here," he muttered as he walked up to the chattering teen.

"Makes both of us," Vii laughed, turning around to face him, "I know hanging out with your ex is weird but he's still a friend… plus nothing needs to be more awkward than it already is." She winked. Vii peered over Will's shoulder to see Jake frantically scrambling through a circle of classmates over to them, "incoming," she whispered.

Jake nervously slid over to the two, interrupting their conversation, and held out at a can of sprite to Will.

"Thanks…" he replied. "Uh… it means a lot you made the effort to invite me, I mean it! And I'm sorry I haven-"

"We're still friends, right? Don't act so weird," Jake chuckled, swinging an arm around him, "and it's my birthday. Tonight's about me, not you."

"Right…" Will responded as Jake removed himself. Vii rolled her eyes and went back to chugging her third can of soda, even if it wasn't cherry.

Jake was finally feeling good for once, he felt confident, he felt excited for his party now. Things would always work out for him, he didn't need any- hold on. At that moment Jake's eyes glanced over the window of his front door. Mary was sitting on the front porch ledge grinning at him. He froze.

*"Oh what's your **problem** ?" He said out loud.*

Will turned to look at him, "I'm sorry? What's my problem?"

"No, no!" Jake groaned, holding his head, "no not you, I don't care about you I meant-"

Will was fully facing Jake now, "What? Did you make me come here just so you could get mad at me some more?"

"Mad at you?" Jake was laughing now, Mary walked away from the window. Jake looked over to Will who was staring sternly at him now. His whole plan to better himself just went to shit looking at him now. Why was he pretending to keep trying to fix this, ***just tell him how you really fee*** *l, he was yelling at himself in his head. "You know what, I'm pissed at you! Even now, I went out of my way to make you feel included and you still don't trust me!"*

"Are you serious?" Will's anger was directed towards Jake as he stepped over to Vii's side, "weren't you over this?"

Jake held his head again, what was he doing, was he even talking to Will at this point? "You always act like you're better than me at everything. At school, on the team, ***at my own birthday party*** *."*

Several kids started to look over at Jake's yelling to see what the fuss was about.

Jake started noticing the attention, and he felt even more wobbly, ***what are you doing? Stop it! Stop it! It's all her fault! She's ruining everything!***

"Whatever, I'm leaving," he put down the can and started to walk past Jake, who grabbed his arm in a tight grip.

"Wait!" Jake pleaded, completely backpedaling on his outburst now, "it's not you. Don't leave!"

Will tried to escape Jake's grip, but he kept pulling him back, "I don't care! Do whatever you want. I'm done pretending to be your friend when I can't even trust you to throw a normal party. I'm over this, and I'm over you and your stupid drama."

He ripped Jake's hand off and was about to storm away, when Jake stared down a laughing Mary through the window. He kept his gaze on her as he clenched his fist, faced Will, and decked his friend in

the nose. When he realized what he just did, he looked back towards the window in panic, but Mary was gone again. She was tormenting him.

Will held his now bleeding nose, glaring at Jake for a moment before turning back towards the door and sprinting out.

"Wait a second-!" Jake shouted , chasing after Will in blind anger as the other rushed out the door. He couldn't keep up, but stopped dead in his tracks as the familiar white haired girl sat back up on top of the ledge of his porch grinning down at him.

"I said you weren't invited! " Jake gritted his teeth.

"You also said you could handle things on your own… look how that turned out for you," Mary simply continued grinning down, knowing she had already won.

"I was doing fine until you interfered. Why'd you have to piss me off?"

Mary clicked her heels together, "I didn't do anything! You had a let of pent up agitation to get out on your own."

"Yeah but you wanted to piss me off, right?"

"All I wanted to do was show you how wrong you were. Your friends don't trust you, and they never will." She chuckled, "you can't win your friend back by just talking. ***He doesn't trust you,*** *he doesn't trust anyone! A lost cause, really. The only way you'll get what you want is by taking direct action yourself."*

Jake folded his arms, avoiding Mary's devils gaze. He didn't want to be part of whatever Mary was trying to sell him, he hated her just as much as he hated everyone else that's wronged him in his life. The only thing he wanted of her was to go away.

The front door was shut, but you could still hear the music blaring from behind. Vii had taken over during the drama to play her own music. Jake hated her music. Everyone was oblivious, continuing on with the party, they didn't even care about him. No one did. He didn't care about any of them, either. He hated them. He hated everyone.

*The only thing he wanted of **everyone** was to go away.*

He looked back up at Mary and he could tell her patience was now running low. She jumped off the porch ledge, her heels clanking loudly against the porch. Jake watched her, but still avoided looking in her eyes.

*"Fine I'll help you. But one condition, I get to decide when I show up and what I wanna do. **None** of you guys are bossing me around."*

"Alright," Mary replied, blinking slowly, "I'll come back later after your little party to talk you through it. However, I cannot be held responsible for the consequences of not following your lords orders. He can get very… angry."

"Whatever," he already turned to go back inside, slamming the front door behind him in Mary's face. He just wanted this night to be over.

Mary stood on his porch a bit longer, watching him head back inside and shout at Vii, snatching her phone away and throwing it across the room. She rolled her eyes grinning and turned away towards the porch steps to leave.

It wasn't hard for Juliet to enter her dream that night. She took some sleeping pills she typically saves for dealing with colds to battle the adrenaline she was facing after what happened earlier. It would be a while before Helen returned back to her own home and was able to sleep, and Will offered to clean up the messes they made alone so that the two of them didn't have to stay.

Juliet didn't live that far away from Will, so naturally she was the first one in the Dream Plaza that night. There wasn't time to wait for the other two. She wanted to get to The Library as soon as possible with NiGHTS.

"Ah- hoo!" Owl yelped as Juliet ran up to him, "Good evening, Visitor!"

"Owl! You're not in the library?"

"Well I figured it was about that time for you all to start showing up for the night... *some* welcome party should be here for you."

"Hmm.." Juliet frowned while looking around, "where *are* NiGHTS and the others?"

"At the aforementioned location. NiGHTS and Twylight have been hard at work deciding what to do about Nightmayr."

Juliet nodded, "Perfect, that's exactly where I need to go." Owl frantically called after the rushing Visitor as she ran away towards the forest where the library was hidden.

"Woah!" Twylight called out from a high shelf as Juliet rushed through the entrance of the library, knocking over a few stacks of books they had lined up around.

NiGHTS looked up from behind a pile he had started on his own, "What's the rush, Jules? Nightmaren?"

Owl poofed into the air in the library, not being able to keep up with Juliet with his own wings. "No Nightmaren on my watch," Owl answered, "the visitor arrived to Nightopia already in a rush!"

"Something happened last night, another Nightmaren got into the Waking World." Juliet explained while she was already brushing through rows of books on the shelves she could reach.

"What?" NiGHTS stood up from his pile in surprise, "another Nightmaren in the Waking World? How did they get in?"

"That's just it… I think it's...me?" Juliet turned around to face NiGHTS. NiGHTS would have laughed at the thought, but Juliet's worried expression told him she was being serious. He flew over to the visitor, hovering at her height.

"Why do you think that? I know you tend to blame yourself a lot for everything that's happening."

Juliet shook her head, "It's not like that this time… and this isn't the first time this weird thing has happened before. I just wanted…" she looked over at the lining of books again, "I wanted to see if maybe

anything here mentioned something about the ability to enter Nightopia while awake."

Twylight flew down from their perch above but was thrown off once again by the other two visitors arrival in a similar fashion to before.

"Juliet!" Helen gasped with relief as she ran in with Will behind her. "How long ago did you get here? Did you find anything yet?" She eagerly intruded.

"Not yet, I just got here," she looked down, "I was just explaining to NiGHTS what happened."

"What *did* happen exactly," Will stepped forward, eyeing at Juliet, "you were pretty vague about it when you left."

It was something Juliet hadn't quite thought about herself. The Nightmaren at school, the slow dance at the Halloween party, and now the Nightmaren on actual Halloween. What… *did* happen? She was daydreaming, she knew. She could feel Nightopia, she could see it like she was there. This had to just be her imagination, she thought. A vivid recollection of the places she discovered and loved. This is what she thought she was seeing all along. But the Nightmaren she'd see in her visions, the way they appeared before her eyes in real life couldn't just be her imagination. They were escaping through Nightopia into the Waking World, they were escaping through her.

Juliet took a deep breath and began explaining her experience to her friends around her. They all listened intently, the Nightmaren stared in disbelief. Even Owl, who appeared to know everything about the Night Dimension appeared perplexed at the revelation. No one was sure what to make of it, but there wasn't any way for them to doubt it's truth. There wasn't room for real disbelief over these claims.

"I've heard of Visitors with strange abilities now and then," Owl spoke up first when Juliet had finished, "but none who were able to connect directly between the two worlds the way you have described."

"Me neither," NiGHTS shook his head, "it's very hard to believe but... I guess nothing is truly against it besides our past understanding of the world."

"Nightmaren in the Waking World isn't the unbelievable part," Twylight looked to NiGHTS, "There have actually been quite a few out there, and I can travel there myself, too, with my portals."

"It just seems so crazy to think about…" NiGHTS frowned, "Wizeman wanted a way to escape into the Waking World his entire life… it seems like it's easier than ever!"

"That's why Fryght had this power," Twylight replied as they looked down at a small swirling portal in their hands, "Wizeman wanted it, but he couldn't control it. I wonder if someone his size would've been able to get through Juliet's dream?"

NiGHTS shuddered at the thought, "well it doesn't matter because he's not here anymore. Nightmayr is though, could he get through this way?"

Twylight shrugged, "Fryght would be able to enter the Waking World on their own once they are reformed… but we should still try to keep this a secret from the Nightmaren because it could easily be weaponized."

"Is there anything we could do about it…" Juliet asked towards Owl.

"Stop daydreaming?" Will shrugged. Helen elbowed him.

"Well… that is a good point," Owl nodded, "is this something you feel as though you can't control?"

"I'm not sure…" Juliet frowned, "I've always zoned out into daydreams, it's something that just kind of happens. But I could try to stay more focused now knowing what's happening."

NiGHTS leapt between the group, "Why are we trying to demonize this ability? I don't think she should stop, I think we should try to understand it more!" He pumped his fists up toward Juliet, "We could try dualizing while you're awake, and maybe I'll end up in the Waking World in your body!"

Juliet blinked in confusion, "is that a thing?"

"I don't know! We could find out, though!"

"Hoo! Calm down, NiGHTS!" Owl fluttered next to the Nightmaren, "you're getting too ahead of yourself!"

"Owl, you're just making Juliet feel bad about something as cool as dimension traveling! Couldn't we try to understand it a *little* bit? What about the books around here, Juliet wanted to find something written about it. We could start there!"

" *I'll* start there," Owl puffed, "and Twylight will assist me," he motioned his wings over to the blue and purple Nightmaren who was hovering there awkwardly. "Meanwhile you and the Visitors should be making sure nothing is happening in Nightopia. The other Nightmaren has been- where is he anyway?"

"The yellow guy?" Will answered.

"You ask that as if you don't know his name…" Helen sighed.

"Jolten was hanging around the doors to Nightopia last I checked, he was probably waiting for you guys to show up," NiGHTS beckoned to the Visitors.

Helen cupped her hands over her mouth, "He's just been waiting? We should go see him!" She grabbed Will's hand.

"NiGHTS?" Juliet looked up at him.

NiGHTS returned the look and sighed, "I guess we gotta go along, Juliet. Don't want Owl to yell at us to get off his lawn tonight," He hovered down closer to her, "I promise we'll figure this okay?"

"...Pinky promise?"

NiGHTS nodded, " *pinky promise* ."

NiGHTS and Juliet had returned to Venturing Forest once again. So much has been happening it felt like an eternity went by since her last visit in Nightopia.

"Remember to keep an eye out for your Ideya, Juliet. Scopopea could be lurking anywhere in these dark woods."

"Right," Juliet affirmed.

She remembered their fight with Scopopea, and the strange mask NiGHTS had worn during the fight. His Persona mask… are there more them?

"Nightmaren that are hiding a Visitors Ideya can be relentless, they'll stir up any trouble, cause any distractions to keep up from getting-"

NiGHTS' attention switched away from the visitor as he noticed a light blue blur rush by in the corner of his eye.

The dualized pair whipped around, NiGHTS appearing to be searching the area intently.

"What? What is it? A nightmaren?"

"No… not quite… it's…"

Suddenly the blue object NiGHTS had been following came to a stop in their view.

"It's Octopaw!" NiGHTS' face lit up, his horns extending with excitement.

"What's that?" Juliet asked.

"He's kind of a scaredy cat. It's been so long since I've seen Nightopia I guess I forgot he was still around! This is great, Juliet!"

"How's it great?" She asked again, trying not to sound unenthusiastic.

"He's great flying practice. He likes to leave behind rings when he flies off, flying through them is great practice for balance! Want to see how many you can fly through?"

NiGHTS had already started taking off as Juliet nodded. The two started off with an immediate drill drash, taking off after the Octopaw

at full speed. Juliet frantically tried to control the flying, but NiGHTS was too excited to think and was zipping around the trees and through caves, it was the fastest Juliet had ever seen NiGHTS fly before. He almost topped Jolten. The Octopaw fearfully flew away from the duo, Juliet tried to hit through as many as his inky rings as she could, but NiGHTS' enjoyment was a great distraction.

It must've really been a while since NiGHTS has been able to do anything like this , Juliet thought to herself, *but he looks like he's having a great time. He needs that distraction.*

They looped around the Nightopia what felt like several times, chasing around the Octopaw wherever it flew off too. Finally, NiGHTS skidded to a halt as the duo watched the Octopaw scurry away in the distance, losing sight of the creature within seconds.

"Well," NiGHTS panted, "that was a blast! I hope we can see him again."

The two tiredly undualized, NiGHTS panting with a big grin on his face, "I haven't flown like that in years!"

"You were awesome! If you keep flying like that I bet you could beat Jolten" Juliet grinned, visibly tired as well.

" *We* were awesome. I know you were scared at first, but you've gotten to be a pretty good flier."

"Well I had a pretty good teacher!" She grinned up at the other.

"Yeah…" NiGHTS turned red, "I guess you did!"

Juliet looked around the woods a bit from her place as the two rested for a bit, "Weird we haven't seen much of the Nightmaren lately. I haven't had any trouble with any of those Nightmare Kids either."

"That does worry me a bit… but the Nightmaren won't act without approval of their leader, and I guess that right now that would be Nightmayr. I wonder what he's up to."

"Do you know a lot of the Nightmaren?" Juliet sat down next to

NiGHTS to rest with him.

NiGHTS chuckled in response, "Pretty much all of them, I even used to give nicknames to some of the 3rd Levels who followed me around."

"Do you miss them sometimes?" She asked.

"The 3rd Levels? Well I guess having to pick them off in Nightopia stings a bit sometimes," he laughed."

"No!" Juliet let out a giggle, "the other nightmaren!"

"Oh, well…" He looked down, "I wouldn't call it me *missing* them… there's nothing I miss about Nightmare or Wizeman. But sometimes I wish at least *some* of them followed me… it was a little lonely at first."

"Well you have Twylight and Jolten following you now!"

NiGHTS laughed, "Jolten only follows me because he has nowhere else to go, and Twylight… hmm I guess I'm not sure. They seem to oppose the Nightmaren but I did notice their attire looks like it was taken directly from Wizeman himself. Just like Nightmayr's cape was."

Juliet's eyes widened, "Could they be working together?"

"No, no!" He chuckled, "I don't think that at all! But I do wonder where it came from?"

"Well maybe once we take down Nightmayr together, the other nightmaren will be able to be our friends too, like Jolten and Twylight."

"Yeah, maybe they could be," NiGHTS laughed at the Visitors out of the world suggestion, but it was a nice dream he thought. Juliet seemed to be full of those.

Nightmare was quiet since the 'big guy' took his little vacation into the Waking World. It would almost be perfect if not for his dressed up little Visitor who dares parade around as if *she* controlled them.

'Her Highness' was responsible for keeping an eye on everything in his absence, and truth be told Reala was almost more scared of her than he was of Nightmayr. What a joke, he thought, what is so scary about a Visitor? Pathetic.

It was quiet without Nightmayr bossing them around as if he earned the title of Master Wizeman's successor. His hateful appearance, the hateful grips he held the others in when he was mad… what did *he* even have to be mad about? Surely Reala had much more of a reason to act like that than *him* .

It was quiet without his group of rascally Visitors running around, immune to his nightmares he so desperately wished to trapped them in. They mostly kept to themselves in Nightmayr's lair as of recently, they were too scared to do anything with their "Queen" around.

It was quiet without… Rachael. It was difficult for Reala to admit, but it was nice to have a partner again. Her whining was atrocious, her existence was repulsive… but she was with him. It was a short lived partnership, but at least he had it even for a little while.

It wasn't as if Reala was completely alone in Nightmare. Naturally, he was the Nightmaren General, Wizeman's true second in command. He knew plenty of other Nightmaren, he *commanded* them to his own bidding.

There was... *one* other Nightmaren he considered his partner for a short while. Once Master Wizeman's rule became stronger… he had no need for the rejected First-Level. Reala rose with Master Wizeman's power while the other kept to his own shadowy lair, the two don't see much of each other anymore. Reala wondered how he must be doing, how Nightmayr may be treating him, if he was even *aware* of Nightmayr's existence. He had to have been aware, in fact with his sneaky way of foreseeing events he must have seen this all coming, even.

His lair was more hidden than the other Nightmaren, a carnival of torture Reala had used to call it. It was the darkest of the others, even Master Wizeman only called him out of hiding in dire situations. Only one Visitor was able to overcome his treacherous toys, and of course it was only because *NiGHTS* was there too.

While brightly colored, the lair was more dimly lit than Reala had remembered. Wizeman was not pleased with either of the two's losses against NiGHTS and his visitors, but naturally Wizeman took more of the failure out on the failed First-Level he had created. Why was he considered a failure of a First-Level? Well, because Master Wizeman couldn't quite get the body right.

"Jackle," Reala voiced echoed through the silence of the Mantle's Lair.

There was a distant humming from behind a large blue and yellow decorated jack-in-the-box, which had been closed up. Reala approached it, "I'm aware you can hear me. Are you pretending you've lost your hearing?"

"Hm? Did you say something, Ree? Sorry," the mad mantle turned his head around to peer at Reala from behind the toy, his toothy smile spreading across his invisible face, "I almost had forgotten what you sounded like, brother."

Reala crossed his arms and stared downward at Jackle. The Nightmaren, although it was created to be a First-Level, towered over Reala while standing. His figure, while completely invisible aside from his mantle and his creepy expressions, was much larger than that of him or NiGHTS.

"Say, Reala? Where is that fancy mask you always liked to wear around me… what was it called? Your Persona? That's the one!"

"Don't play stupid, you know why I'm not wearing it."

"Hmm…" Jackle turned away from the other again, "yeah, I guess I do. Why are you even here, anyway? You didn't miss little ol me did you?" His voice cracked through his words, Reala knew he was being mocked.

"The truth, Jackle? I'm at a loss here. I need some answers, and I suppose your annoying riddles will have to do for now."

"Heheheheh…" Jackle rose up, hovering in the air above Reala now. His eyes peered down at the smaller nightmaren, "I never

thought I would see the day when Reala, Wizeman's best little puppy would come running back for my help with his little tail between his legs!"

Reala took a flight backwards, Jackle's grin was suffocating him. Maybe Jackle was more mad at him than he originally thought.

"You want *my* help with your issues, brother?" Jackle began to cackle, "let me see how determined you really are!" He spread his gloved hands out, summoning several of his dancing tarot cards around him. Reala was quick to react as Jackle began throwing them his way, nearly missing their quick slices.

Reala dashed around Jackle's lair as he threw his cards, the light in the lair began to brighten up once again as Jackle's cackles grew louder with intensity. It echoed even inside Reala's head. The sound of the cards whipping towards him were difficult to place, and Reala wasn't sure how he was dodging them so easily. Unless Jackle was *purposefully* missing him. He was just… toying with him!

Reala seized flying and turned around to face Jackle, who still was spiraling around his lair full of life, his cards still bounding towards Reala and just barely scraping by him. When Jackle saw Reala had ceased flying, his laughter and quick attacks died down.

"Aww, jeez," Jackle had drooped down, "It's no fun when you're not running away."

"Enough games!" Reala shouted, gritting his teeth, "if Master Wizeman were here-"

"Master Wizeman is *not* here," Jackle had reminded Reala, and began to shake his head, "I think I have found your issue, sibling. Your self worth is relying too much on a dead man."

"Master Wizeman isn't dead!" Reala pounded his fist loudly on one of Jackle's toys, smashing it into pieces. Jackle hovered above the ground in silence, a little surprised at Reala's lash out. Reala was always prone to tantrums around him for some reason. "He cannot be dead…" He continued, "because what are we supposed to do about this mess without him? I cannot take Nightmayr out on my

own! And NiGHTS and his stupid little visitor pets have no chance against Fryght!"

"Fryght?" Jackle eyed Reala with intrigue, "so the other God of the Night Dimension is going to reveal itself at last?"

"If it does the entire dimension is going to fall apart… that thing will *destroy us all* !"

"And if I am not mistaken... " Jackle flew closer, cupping his hands together in thought as he continued to stare down at Reala, "you're worried about NiGHTS, aren't you?"

Reala choked at Jackle's claim, "I'm only worried that NiGHTS is going to do what he always does, have the Nightmaren all destroyed by his carelessness!"

"If Fryght shows itself to the world it would not only destroy the Nightmaren, but it would make its way to the Waking World as well. It would destroy all of mankind," the mad mantle's grin grew wider. "It is beyond you, or even me, or even NiGHTS, sibling."

"It's beyond Master Wizeman now, too," Reala cursed. "Nightmayr has already infiltrated the Waking World through that daydreaming Visitor, and one of the pieces of Fryght is already awake as well."

"Then it seems it's already begun," Jackle laughed to himself. He approached Reala closer once again, "What are you going to do about it, sibling?"

Reala clenched his fists, "Nightmayr has to be stopped no matter the cost, Master Wizeman's throne belongs to no one else. But what happens after that?"

Jackle let out a cackle and flew backwards at Reala's determination, "The throne of darkness will be open for the taking when Fryght is casted out of the world again. But as long as chaos reigns so will Fryght. Just as, as long as darkness exists within the hearts of humans, Master Wizeman will exist as well," Jackle let out a final cackle as he vanished into thin air, his cape swirling around him. In his place a small card fluttered to the floor.

Reala flew over, looking down at the card from above. He bent over, turning it over onto the other side to see what Jackle had left behind for him. He was used to Jackle leaving a mockery of Reala, he assumed it would be another fool just like old times. This time, though, Jackle left behind something different.

The Tower.

Not much else happened that night in Nightopia. NiGHTS and Juliet continued exploring on foot after their chase with Octopaw until Juliet had to wake up for school. It was strange how long her dreams feel sometimes despite only a few hours passing in the real world. Time worked weirdly in the dimension of dreams, although she supposed that made sense.

She wished she would've been able to stop by and see how Owl was doing before she awoke last night, but if the two had really found anything Twylight would have most likely teleported to show them… so they must have not found anything. That's what she told herself, anyway. Owl had mentioned other Visitors have had strange powers before, too. What kind of powers did *they* have?

Downstairs Juliet's Mum was in the process of brewing coffee for herself, her Dad was still fast asleep upstairs. He worked late shifts as a chef at one of the big restaurants in the city, particularly known for their delicious cheesecake. He used to bring some home for Juliet all the time when she was a kid, but not so much as of late. 'Too old for sweets' she figured her Mum would say to her.

"Good morning, sweetie!" Her mum greeted as she groggily headed downstairs, "do you want any coffee?"

"No," Juliet responded. She wasn't a huge fan of coffee, unless it was one of those frozen caramel drinks from Fullmoon.

"Well, what do you want for breakfast, then?"

"I don't know," Juliet rubbed her eyes, "I'm not very hungry. I'm not actually feeling that well."

"Did you eat too much Halloween candy last night?" She laughed.

"No I didn't, my head kind of hurts."

"Should I call the school? Do you have a fever?" Her mum walked over to place her hand on Juliet's forehead.

"No, that's fine. I think I would feel worse if I *didn't* go to school."

"You have to eat something before you leave if that's the case," she placed her hands on her hips, "how about you take a few cereal bars. I'll drive you today, too."

Juliet nodded and followed her mum's advice, "Yeah, okay. Thank you."

She wasn't lying about not feeling well, ever since she got home from Will's last night she was feeling dizzy. She already felt too overwhelmed by everything else that was going on, but learning about her daydreaming ability last night even worsened her stress. She was going to have to be extra careful from now on, and that worried her a lot.

Her mum drove her to school on her way to work, which was a little later than Juliet would have liked to arrive. It was better than not showing up at all.

The first thing Juliet did as soon as she got to school was head to where Will usually hung out, she was curious about what ended up happening with that nightmaren they caught at his house. She saw him with another girl in their grade, someone she didn't know herself but had seen him hang around often at school. When he saw Juliet approaching, he turned to say something to the other girl and then left to meet up with Juliet.

"What's up?" He asked.

"'What's up?'" She repeated in a question, "what did you do with the *nightmaren* at your house?" She spoke the word *nightmaren* in a whisper.

"Well, I wasn't really sure what to do with Pogo this morning, I wasn't really sure what kind of food he would eat so I left him a bowl of dry cereal and I'll check back when I get home. Nobody goes in the

basement since we just use it for storage so as long as he doesn't make any noise I think no one will notice."

Juliet was speechless. "Pogo?"

"Well, yeah I figured he needed a name. We can't just keep calling him 'the nightmaren'."

"You left him… cereal?"

"It's not like I'm going to be feeding him Nightopians!" Will shouted defensively, a little too loud enough for a few heads to turn over. "Look, I just don't know what to do with it. Do *you* want to take him?"

"Definitely not!" Juliet stood back, "you can keep feeding him cereal, I *don't* want him at my house."

Will looked back behind him, "I told Vii I would meet up with her outside of our class, so I gotta go but I'll see you later."

"Okay!" Juliet waved as the two split up, "let me know if he eats that cereal tonight!"

Juliet looked at the time as she turned away to head to class, it was about 1 minute until the bell would go off. She was so late!

She sped walk to her class, just barely arriving in time before the bell went off to signal her as late. Alaia looked over from desk as Juliet groggily sat down.

"I don't think I've ever seen you late before. Were you with your friends?" She asked innocently, but it still felt bad to hear Alaia ask that.

"Yeah but my mom drove me to school today later too," she sighed, "so I'm feeling really behind this morning."

"I don't blame you, I've felt pretty weird myself lately," Alaia looked up at the front of the classroom where Miss D was already starting to write some warmups on the board, "last class, Miss D asked me to go print some things out for her in the library, then she asked where I had been when I wasn't in class! It was so weird…"

"That is weird," Juliet admitted, "I had to partner up with the new kid and he's… not very good at mathematics."

"So I've heard," Alaia chuckled, Juliet joined in until Miss D called the classes attention to begin.

Class went along as usual, but Juliet was finding it hard to focus. It didn't help that Nicky was staring at her the entire time, either. She had almost forgotten he was in her class, again.

It wasn't just him, though. Everything that happened yesterday, last night, it all kept swirling around in her head. Before she knew it, Juliet had even stopped writing on her own paper. Her pencil just wouldn't move anymore. It felt like the room was spinning.

"Juliet?" Miss D asked as she brushed by her desk, "is something wrong? Do you not understand the assignment?"

"Oh… no I understand it fine, Miss Dremarin. I'm just thinking about some other stuff right now."

"Why don't you see me after class? We're just finishing up here, anyway" Her teacher asked.

"Yeah, no problem," Juliet agreed.

Juliet went back to trying to work silently, but the chattering kicking up in the hallways distracted her too easily. The bell to end class went off not long after.

"You can go ahead," Juliet told Alaia as the two began to pack up, "I'm gonna stay and talk to Miss D if that's okay."

"Yeah, sure," Alaia smiled, "I'll wait for you outside though, okay?"

Juliet nodded and walked with Alaia to the front of the room, she followed the rest of the class outside while Juliet stayed behind and watched her go. She walked up to Miss D's desk, hiking her bag up nervously.

"You wanted to talk to me?" She asked, biting her lip. The last time a teacher asked to speak with her after class they turned into a

Nightmaren.

"So, what's wrong?" Miss D took Juliet's hands and held them on her own lap, "you're usually so full of energy during class. Nicky isn't taking too much out of you, is he?"

Juliet shook her head, letting out a chuckle, "No, it's fine. I'm just not feeling well today."

"Is it physical?" Her teacher asked her, then lightly tapped Juliet's temple, "or is it something in your head?"

The girl sighed, it was definitely more in her head, "I've been… really stressed lately. A lot of things have been going on and I guess… I'm worried things are changing too fast."

"So you're worried about things… in your life changing too fast for you to keep up?"

"Mhm," Juliet nodded nervously, "it feels like everyone around me is so much more prepared for these things. I've recently found something out about myself that I guess just worries me more than I've really let on to everyone else. I think I'm… scared?"

Miss D leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes, nodding to herself, "you're at that age where it's normal to feel these things, and be scared by them. Life changing too rapidly can be stressful, especially when you feel like you can't keep up with it." She opened her eyes and leaned back into Juliet, "and it's okay to admit when you're scared by it. I know many kids your age have a hard time with that."

Miss D's touch was comforting to Juliet, and she never really opened up to anyone like this about what's been going on. Not even NiGHTS, not like NiGHTS would even understand… this all seems normal to him. Something came over Juliet, being here speaking with her teacher… a powerful emotion started to wave over her. She started crying.

"I… I'm sorry," Juliet began wiping her tears away, "I never really let that out before. I'm sorry! I don't know how that happened."

"That's okay," Miss D smiled warmly, "sometimes when visitors feel a powerful enough emotion around another, it can intensify your feelings."

Juliet continued wiping her eyes with the sleeve of her jacket, "I guess I'm just not used to letting that out. I'm usually the positive one, you know?"

"That's true!" Miss D agreed, "and I miss seeing your smile in class. But don't ever feel like you have to wear a mask, especially around me. I *know* what you're really feeling, Juliet."

"I know… I'll try to push through it." She brushed off a final tear and then smiled, "thank you for that."

"It's no problem," her teacher stood up, signalling the end of their conversation, "I believe you have a friend waiting outside for you. You should go see her."

Juliet nodded, hiking her bag up with confidence this time, "you're right. Thank you again! I'll see you next class!" She waved as she turned to run off as Miss D began shuffling some papers, she noticed her slip one paper underneath the rest of them.

She caught up with Alaia, who like she had said, was waiting for her outside the classroom. Things were changing, but she had a feeling everything would eventually work out in the end. They had to, right?